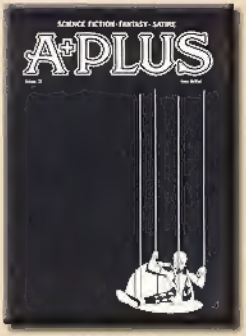

Sir Real's

UNDERGROUND COMIX CLASSIX

A+Plus #5

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Stories:

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SCIENCE FICTION · FANTASY · SATIRE

A+PLUS

issue 5

one dollar

COMIC BOOKS ARE JUST A FRAME OF MIND!

Ain't it the truth. Ah, but on to other things of significance. We harold[?] the return of JAMES A. OSTEN [co-producer of the GARGOYLE & PUNKIE] and the addition of WILLIAM FRANCIS LOEBS to the MEGATON STAFF. DAVE MONAK also debuts this issue. The cover illustration is by MICHAEL KUCHARSKI [& a tip of the hat to JOHN BENSON for another excellent back cover design].

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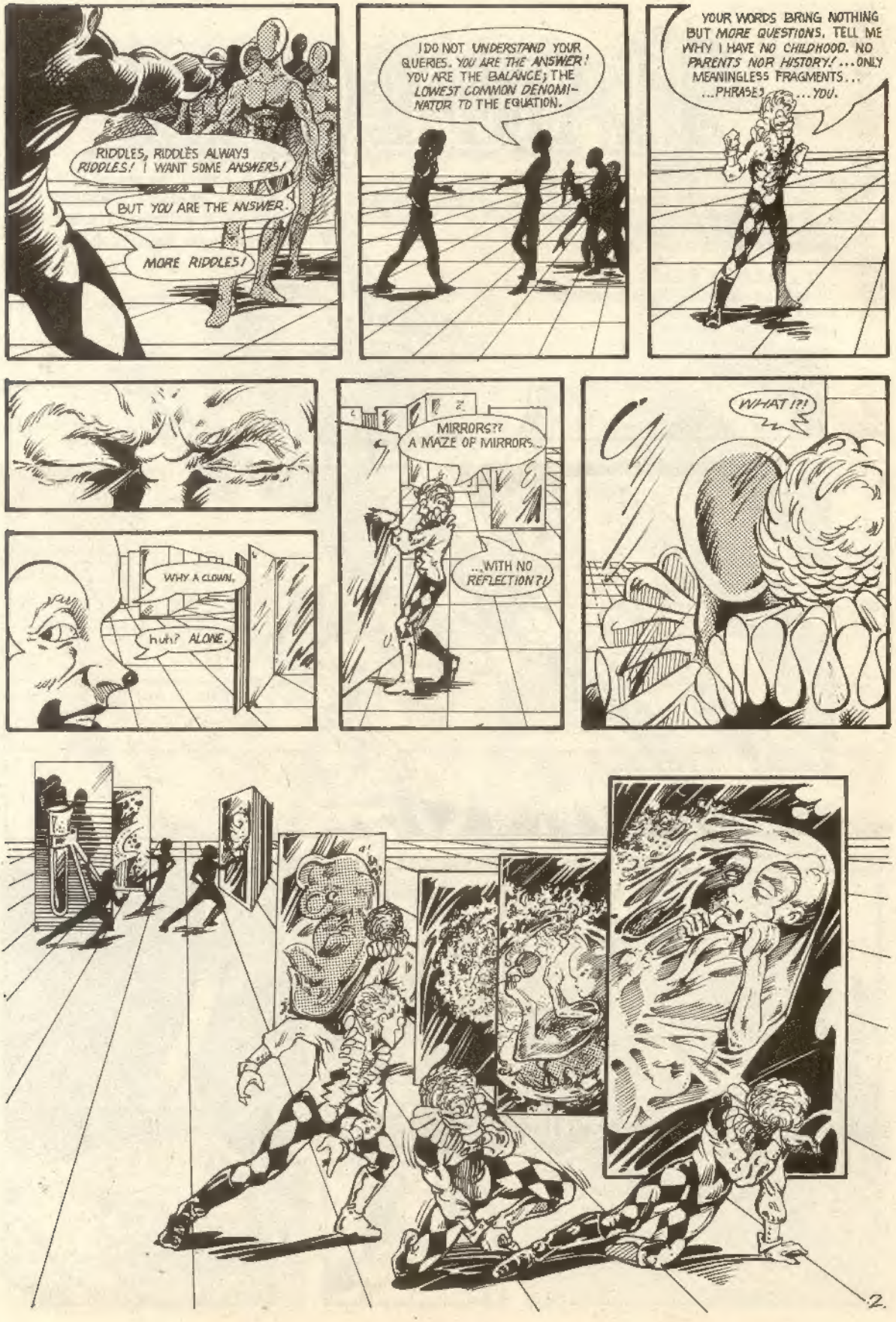
The HARLEQUIN

AS IT HAS BEGUN FOR THREE CONSECUTIVE NIGHTS, IT AGAIN BEGINS....

THE HARLEQUINS SLUMBER INVADED BY THE RAVAGES OF A NIGHTMARE WHOSE CARNAGE WILL BE FELT LONG AFTER HIS WAKENING.

HE STANDS ALONE IN A CHAMBER OF LIVING LIGHT.

SUDDENLY THERE ARE THE OTHERS!

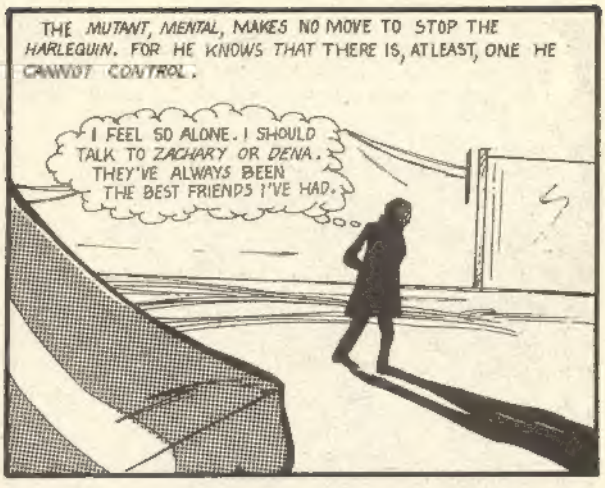

RIDDLES, RIDDLES ALWAYS RIDDLES! I WANT SOME ANSWERS!
BUT YOU ARE THE ANSWER.
MORE RIDDLES!
I DO NOT UNDERSTAND YOUR QUERIES. YOU ARE THE ANSWER! YOU ARE THE BALANCE; THE LOWEST COMMON DENOMINATOR TO THE EQUATION.
YOUR WORDS BRING NOTHING BUT MORE QUESTIONS. TELL ME WHY I HAVE NO CHILDHOOD. NO PARENTS NOR HISTORY!...ONLY MEANINGLESS FRAGMENTS...
...PHRASES...
...YOU.
WHY A CLOWN.
huh? ALONE.
MIRRORS?? A MAZE OF MIRRORS...
...WITH NO REFLECTION?!
WHAT!?!
2.

NOOOOOOOO!
IT IS THE YEAR 2037. NOSTALGIA HAS GIVEN BIRTH TO A NEW AGE OF THE CIRCUS. BUT IS THERE A PLACE IN THIS CARNIVAL ILLUSION OF ANOTHER ERA OR ANY AGE FOR AN....
ARTIFICIAL MAN
STORY · ART · AND EVERYTHING ELSE · KEVIN SIEMBIEDA
IT CAN'T...YET... IT MUST BE TRUE. I'VE NO MEMORIES OF PARENTS... CHILDHOOD... BECAUSE... I HAD NONE! I WAS GROWN IN A STERILE LAB! NURTURED AND GROWN BY SYNTHETIC MEANS!
AN ARTIFICIAL MAN
I... HAVE TO CLEAR MY HEAD!... MAKE SENSE OUT OF THIS.
A WALK IN THE NIGHT AIR ... Yeah... WALK.
THINK.
☆Popcorn☆
IT SEEMS SO INCREDIBLE INSANE!! YET I KNOW IT'S TRUE! IT'S TRUE. BUT WHY CREATE A HARLEQUIN? THAT'S ALL I HAVE EVER BEEN.
OR IS IT? I'VE BEEN WITH THE CIRCUS FOR A YEAR-N-A-HALF. I DON'T REMEMBER ANYTHING ELSE.
3.

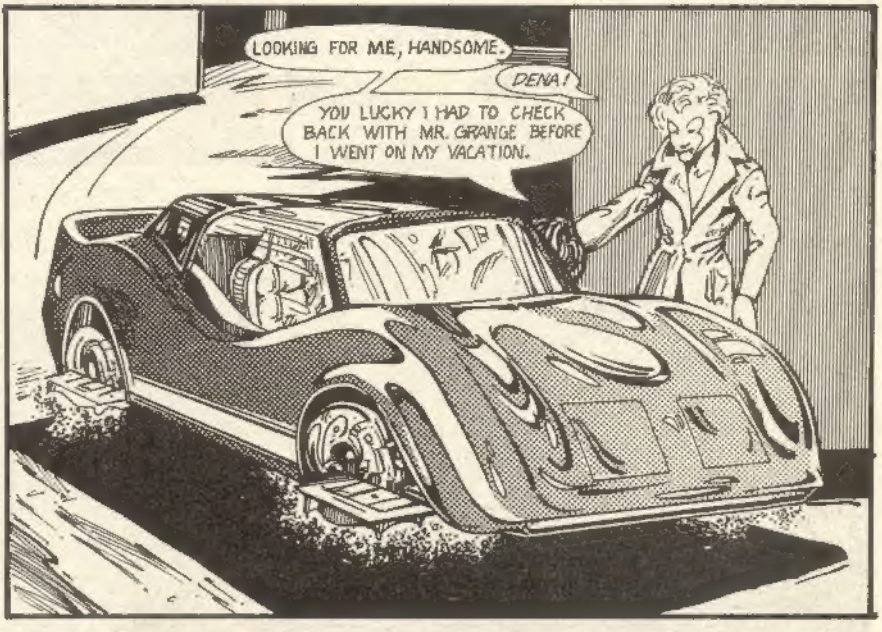
YAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAGGRK
WHA...
BURK... LANDY WHY ARE...
...YOU ATTACKING?!?
4.

I'VE WORKED WITH EACH OF THESE MEN. WHY DID THEY ATTACK ME? IS MY LIFE TO BE RIDDLED WITH MYSTERY?
HAHAHAHAHAHA!!
MENTAL?!
NONE OTHER. I'M GLAD YOU'VE SEEN MY ACT. Ah, BUT MY FRONT AS A MENTALIST IS ALL YOU KNOW OF ME.
YOU ARE DEFINITELY THE BEST I HAVE EVER SEEN! 3 MEN; 12 SECONDS.
MY REAL WORK IS ...ah... MANIPULATION AND EXTERMINATION. SOME CALL IT MURDER!
WHY BOAST TO ME? IT COULD LEAD TO..
SO, YOU BELIEVE ME UNQUESTIONINGLY.
YOUR AURA IS LIKE MUD.
YES.
I BELIEVE YOU CAN SEE MY ASTRAL FORM.
5.

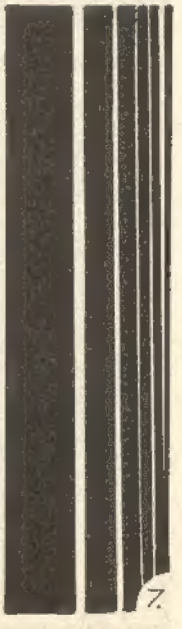
THAT IS WHY I HAVE OPENLY CONFESSED TO YOU. WE ARE TWO OF A KIND! WE BOTH POSSESS SPECIAL ABILITIES.
WE'RE BOTH GENETIC MUTATIONS. A NEW BREED, SUPERIOR TO THE OLD.
YOU ARE WRONG, MENTAL.
WRONG? WRONG!! NO... THEY KNOW WE ARE THEIR SUPERIORS. THAT IS WHY PEOPLE FEAR US. HUNT US DOWN, TO BE PLACED IN GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS! STUDIED LIKE RATS IN A CAGE.
MUTANTS MUST UNITE AND SILENTLY, LETHALLY STRIKE BACK. ONLY SOMEONE WHO HAS FELT THE PAIN OF BEING DIFFERENT CAN UNDERSTAND.
WILL YOU JOIN ME, MUTANT?!
I KNOW LITTLE OF WHAT YOU SPEAK. I AM...AH...I...I'AM NOT LIKE YOU. OF THAT I AM SURE!
DON'T PLAY GAMES WITH ME CLOWN! I'VE COME TO HELP YOU.
YOU CAN'T EVEN HELP YOURSELF WHILE BLINDED BY YOUR HATE! YOU LIVE FOR VENGENCE. HATE MOTIVATES YOUR EVERY MOVE. BUT WHAT WILL YOU BE WHEN THAT FIRE DIES?
SURPRISE ME.
YOU'LL BE ALONE. MORE ALONE THAN YOU COULD EVER IMAGINE.
NICE POETRY. BUT IT MEANS NOTHING!
YOU'RE A DEAD MAN, HARLEQUIN. I WAS SENT TO KILL YOU TONIGHT. THE NAME MORGOTH MEAN ANYTHING? IT SEEMS YOU'VE BEEN INTERFERING WITH MORGOTH'S PLANS LATELY. HE WANTS IT STOPPED! PERMANENTLY!!
INSTEAD I'VE COME TO YOU AS AN ALLY! I'VE BEEN PLANNING TO... TERMINATE HIM!
TOGETHER WE CAN CRUSH HIM. TAKE CONTROL OF HIS ORANIZATION...
6.

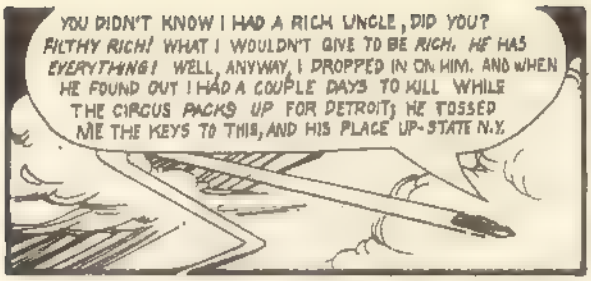

THE MUTANT, MENTAL, MAKES NO MOVE TO STOP THE HARLEQUIN. FOR HE KNOWS THAT THERE IS, AT LEAST, ONE HE CANNOT CONTROL.
I FEEL SO ALONE. I SHOULD TALK TO ZACHARY OR DENA. THEY'VE ALWAYS BEEN THE BEST FRIENDS I'VE HAD.

MAGIC
ZACHARY ISN'T IN. WHY! WHEN I NEED YOU MOST!! ZACH YOU'RE... ALWAYS...THERE, I.....I... SUPPOSE I COULD FIND DENA. BUT HOW DO I TELL THE WOMAN I LOVE THAT I'M....


LOOKING FOR ME, HANDSOME.
DENA!
YOU LUCKY I HAD TO CHECK BACK WITH MR. GRANGE BEFORE I WENT ON MY VACATION.

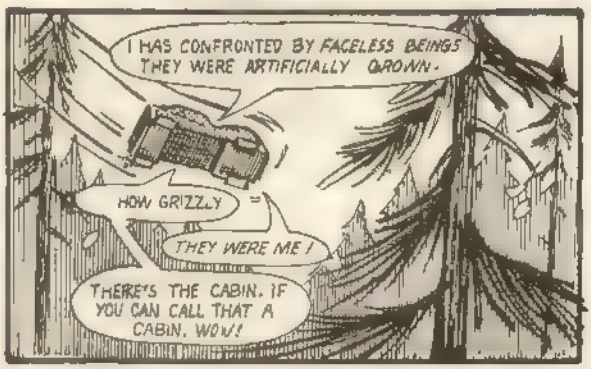
PRETTY SHARP, eh? IT'S THE LATEST IN ANTI-GRAVITATIONAL FLIGHT VEHICLES.
COME ON!
BUT... DON'T JUST STAND THERE. HOP IN! YOU CAN USE A FEW DAYS OFF WITH A PRETTY LADY, CAN'T YOU? Hmmm.
I HAVE TO TALK TO...SOMEONE...



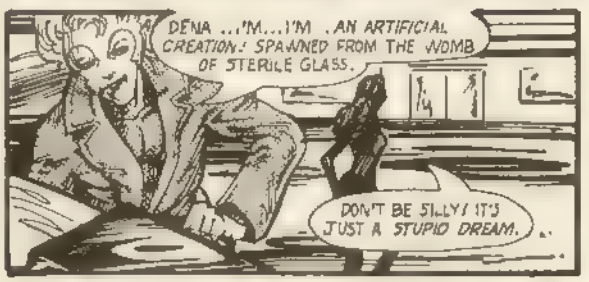

YOU DIDN'T KNOW I HAD A RICH UNCLE, DID YOU? FILTHY RICH! WHAT I WOULDN'T GIVE TO BE RICH. HE HAS EVERYTHING! WELL, ANYWAY, I DROPPED IN ON HIM. AND WHEN HE FOUND OUT I HAD A COUPLE DAYS TO KILL WHILE THE CIRCUS PACKS UP FOR DETROIT; HE TOSSED ME THE KEYS TO THIS, AND HIS PLACE UP-STATE N.Y.

SAY, YOU'RE EVEN QUIETER THAN USUAL. SOMETHING WRONG?

HOW... HOW CAN I TELL YOU... I HAD THIS DREAM.
ABOUT ME I HOPE
NO.


I WAS CONFRONTED BY FACELESS BEINGS THEY WERE ARTIFICIALLY GROWN.
HOW GRIZZLY
THEY WERE ME!
THERE'S THE CABIN. IF YOU CAN CALL THAT A CABIN. WOW!

REALLY SOMETHING ISN'T IT!
WHAT MONEY CAN'T BUY.


DENA ...'M...I'M . AN ARTIFICIAL CREATION: SPAWNED FROM THE WOMB OF STERILE GLASS.
DON'T BE SILLY! IT'S JUST A STUPID DREAM.

NO! IT'S TRUE! I CAN'T HIDE FROM THE TRUTH ANY LONGER.
JOEY?!
THAT'S RIDICULOUS! YOU'RE AS NORMAL

NORMAL? THIS IS JUST ONE OF MY...eh ABILITIES.
OH MY GOD...

MENTAL WAS RIGHT ABOUT ONE THING: I AM DIFFERENT. BUT WHAT AM I?! NOT A MUTANT! AM I EVEN HUMAN!!

DENA, HELP ME HOLD ME!
PLEASE DON'T . Ah.... LETS GO INSIDE, huh?

INTERLUDE

FOR TWO DAYS YOU HAVE CLUNG TO THE SHADOWS. HIDING. WAITING.. FOR IT IS IN THE VERY SHADOWS, WHICH NOW OFFERS SANCTUARY, THAT DEATH WAITS.

AND SO YOU RUN!

IT WAS ALL SO PERFECT
THE SEVEN YEARS YOU HAD WORKED FOR MORGOTH HAD HONED YOUR MENTAL ABILITIES TO AWESOME PROPORTIONS.

YOU, MENTAL, THE SILENT VOICE OF DOOM. WHAT BETTER ASSASSIN IS THERE THAN ONE WHO CAN MENTALLY, SUBLIMINALLY, IMPLANT THE SEEDS OF SELF DESTRUCTION? NO PHYSICAL ASSASSIN, NO WEAPON, NO EVIDENCE.

IT DIDN'T MATTER HOW MANY HAD DIED AT YOUR HANDS NOR HOW MANY MORE TO COME. MORGOTH WAS YOUR KEY TO POWER. AND WITH THAT POWER, THE MEANS TO INFLICT YOUR VENGEANCE.

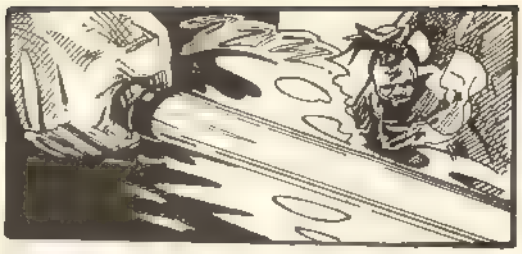
MORGOTH SUCCUMBED TO YOU WITH SURPRISING EASE. AND FOR A MOMENT, YOU STOOD TRIUMPHANT! BUT, ONLY FOR A MOMENT.

YOU DELVED DEEP INTO MORGOTH'S TWISTED MIND. THE COUNTLESS LIVES TORTURED AND DESTROYED WERE ALL PART OF SOME INSANE GAME. THEIR WAS NO LUST FOR WEALTH OR POWER. NO BURNING HATE. ONLY THE GAME! THE PEOPLE/PLAYERS... PAWNS; TOYS. PUPPETS TO BE USED AND MANIPULATED.

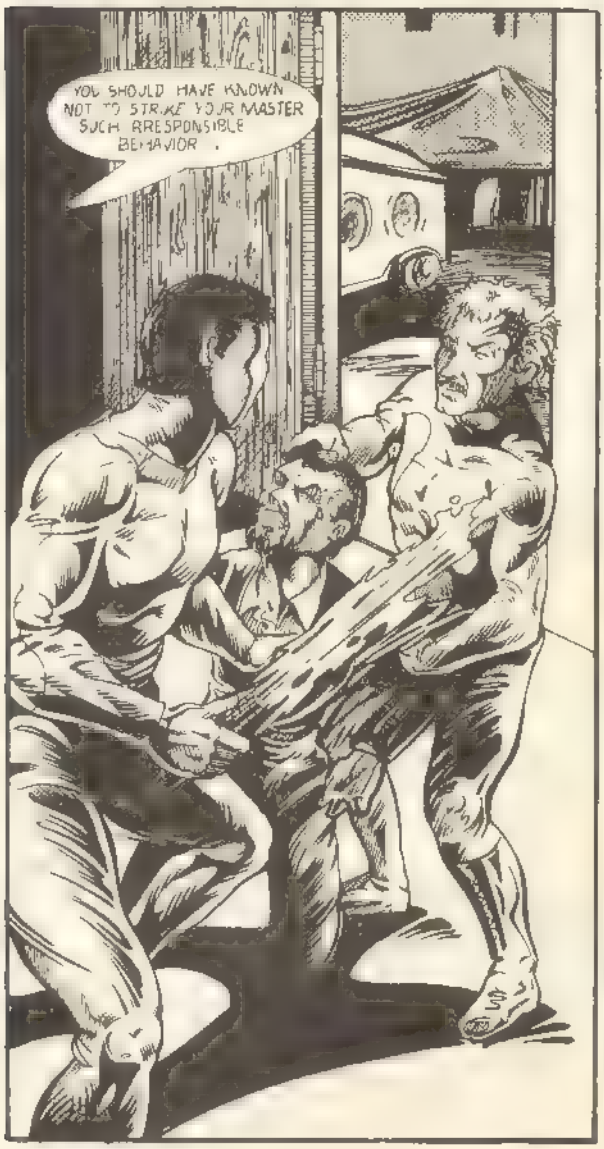
HATE FEAR VENGENCE YOU COULD UNDERSTAND. BUT... THIS...! YOUR MIND REELED AND SNAPPED; AND YOU RAN! RAN TO THE ONLY ONE WHO WOULD UNDERSTAND. HELP. RAN LIKE A PUPPET ON A STRING.

GRANGE BROS.
CIRCUS
I DON'T BELIEVE I'VE ACTUALLY MADE IT BACK TO CENTRAL PARK ALIVE.
MORGOTH MUST BE TOYING WITH ME. THAT COULD BE A FATAL MISTAKE.
HARLEQUIN?
Hmmmm?
THANK GOD! I NEED YOUR HELP!
NO MATTER WHAT YOU KNOW OR THINK OF ME, WE MUST JOIN FORCES TO CRUSH MORGOTH! HE'S ...Ah...
OH MY GOD... MORGOTH
VERY PERCEPTIVE, IF NOT A LITTLE BIT LATE

AIIIEEEEE



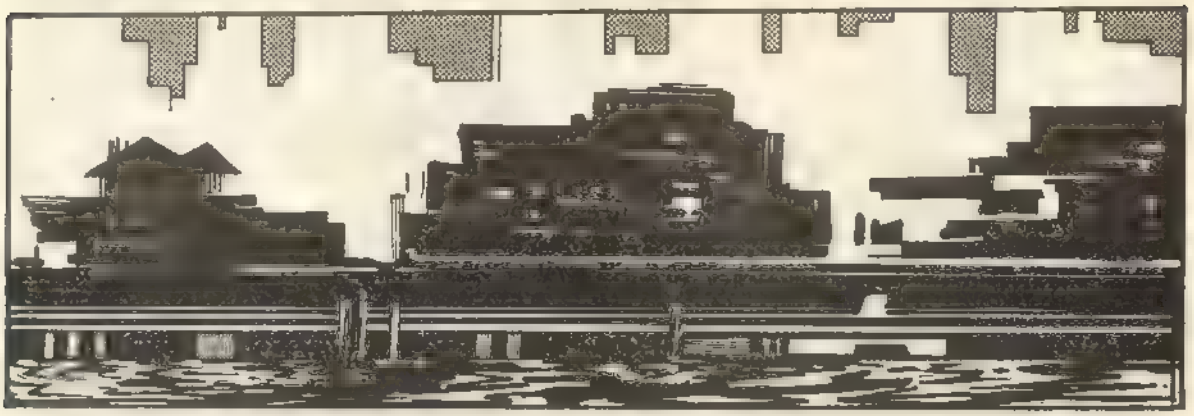
IT'S VERY DIFFICULT TO CONCENTRATE WHEN YOURE IN PAIN ISN'T IT.


YOU SHOULD HAVE KNOWN NOT TO STRIKE YOUR MASTER SUCH IRRESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOR .

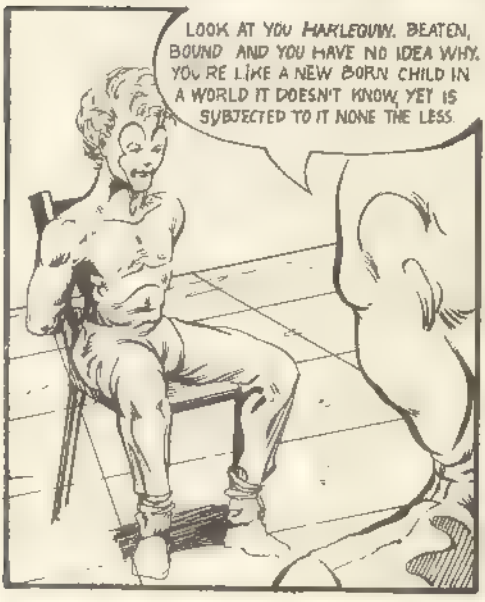
MUST BE CRUSHED.

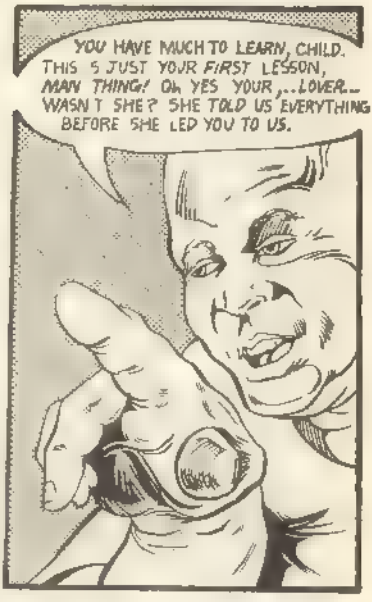
FINISH HIM! SLOWLY. I HAVE A MUCH MORE PRESSING ENGAGEMENT ON THE WATER FRONT

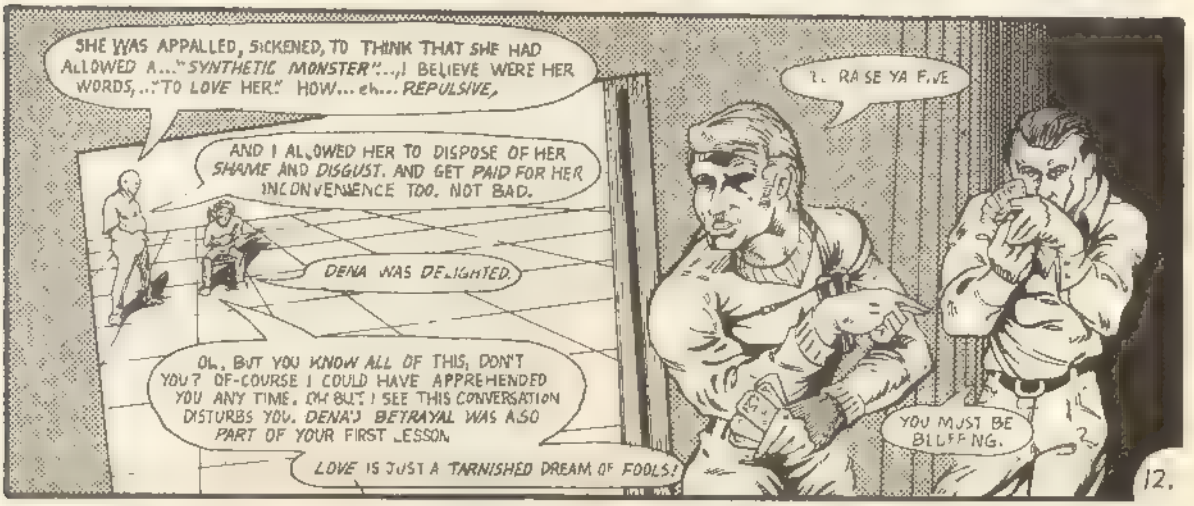
SOMEWHERE OFF THE *SLUDGE* FILMED *HUDSON BAY* THE CHILL OF WINTER ENFOLDS THE FROZEN STRUCTURES THAT LINE ITS SHOULDER. YET, INSIDE AT LEAST ONE OF THEM THE COLD IS OF LITTLE CONCERN.



CONFRONTATION


LOOK AT YOU *HARLEQUIN*. BEATEN, BOUND AND YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHY. YOU'RE LIKE A NEW BORN CHILD IN A WORLD IT DOESN'T KNOW, YET IS SUBJECTED TO IT NONE THE LESS.


YOU HAVE MUCH TO LEARN, CHILD. THIS IS JUST YOUR *FIRST* LESSON, *MAN THING!* OH YES YOUR ...LOVER... WASN'T SHE? SHE *TOLD* US EVERYTHING BEFORE SHE LED YOU TO US.

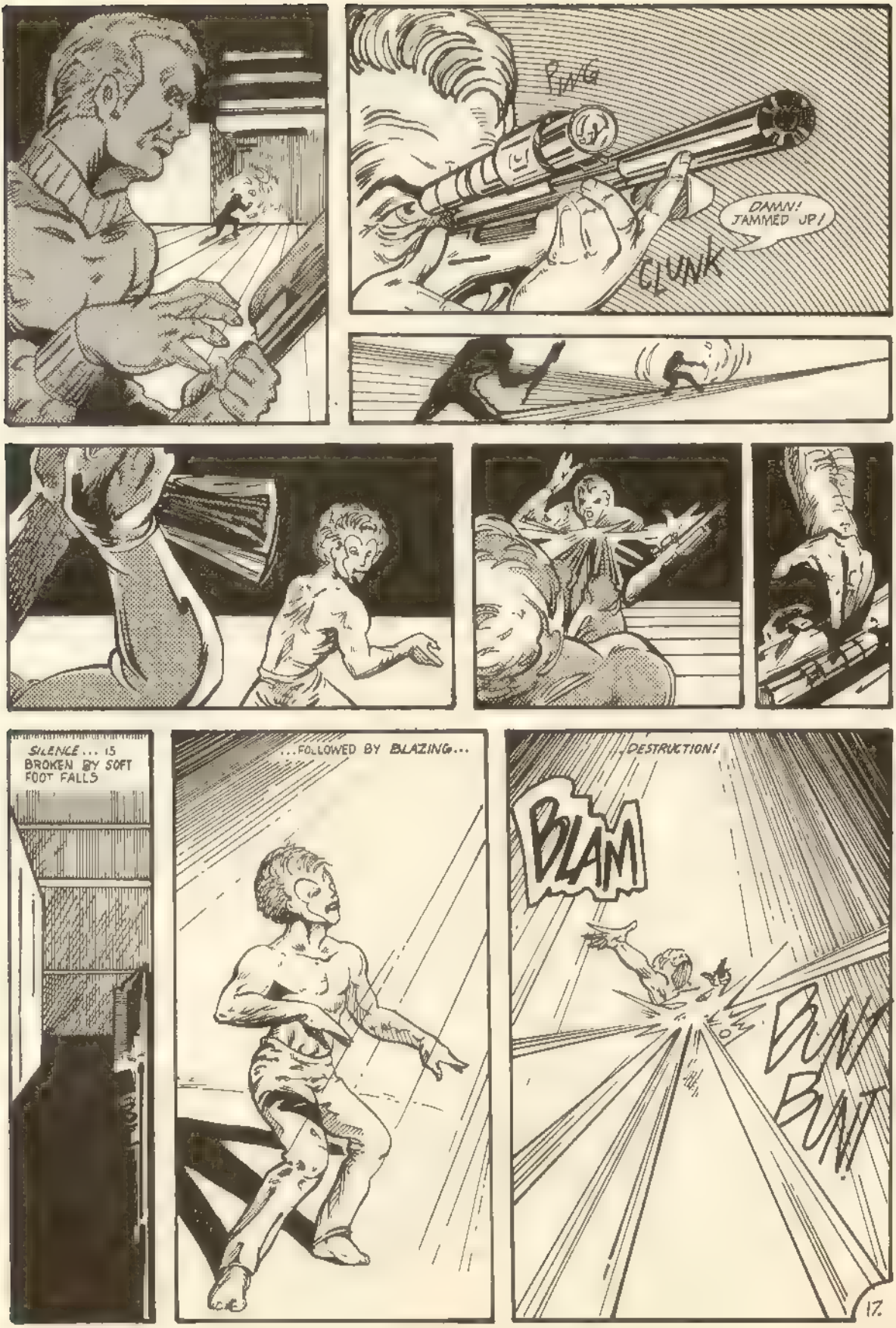

SHE WAS APPALLED, SICKENED, TO THINK THAT SHE HAD ALLOWED A..."*SYNTHETIC MONSTER*"...I BELIEVE WERE HER WORDS,..."TO LOVE HER." HOW...eh...*REPULSIVE*,
AND I ALLOWED HER TO DISPOSE OF HER *SHAME* AND *DISGUST*. AND GET *PAID* FOR HER INCONVENIENCE TOO. NOT BAD.
DENA WAS DELIGHTED.
OH, BUT YOU *KNOW ALL* OF THIS, DON'T YOU? OF-COURSE I COULD HAVE APPREHENDED YOU ANY TIME. OH BUT I SEE THIS CONVERSATION DISTURBS YOU. *DENA'S BETRAYAL* WAS ALSO *PART* OF YOUR FIRST LESSON.
LOVE IS JUST A *TARNISHED* DREAM OF FOOLS!
I RAISE YA FIVE
YOU MUST BE BLUFFING.

YOU ARE THE FOOL, HARLEQUIN!! YOU AND YOUR ENTIRE INCEPTION IS A FOOLS REALITY!
I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU CAME INTO BEING NOR WHY. I CAN MERELY SPECULATE. I MUST ADMIT YOU ARE A VERY, VERY INTRIGUING PUZZLE.
SOMEONE HAS TAKEN THE TEST TUBE BABY TO IT'S FARTHEST HEIGHTS. YOU ARE THE TRIUMPH OF BIO-GENETICS IF NOTHING ELSE! BUT I FEAR YOUR FATE IS A TRAGIC ONE. FOR YOU ARE THE BALANCE! YOU, THE PRODUCT OF SELF RIGHTEOUS MINDS, ARE TO RIGHT THE PRESUMED IMBALANCE. THE EMBODIMENT OF THE ANCIENT AXIOM:" GOOD VERSUS EVIL"!!
THE COSMIC BALANCING OF THE SCALES! AND I'M YOUR FIRST TARGET.
IF...IF WHAT YOU SAY IS TRUE, WHY HAVE I NO KNOWLEDGE OF IT?
NO SUCH MISSION
BECAUSE THAT IS YOUR ONLY PURPOSE! YOU ARE THE LOWEST COMMON DENOMINATOR.
YOU WERE DESIGNED FOR ONE PURPOSE! TO RIGHT THE IMBALANCE!! THAT IS ALL YOU KNOW.
13

HAVE YOU NEVER WONDERED WHY YOU ARE OFTEN AT A PARTICULAR PLACE AT A PARTICULAR TIME. WHY YOU'VE CONFRONTED THE FILTH OF THE STREETS. WHY YOU HAVE THWARTED A FEW OF MY GAMES* RESENTLY!
DID YOU THINK IT ALL COINCIDENCE?!
*APLUS #3
WHY YOU?
MY LINKS TO THE UNDER-WORLD ARE GREATER THAN ANY SINGLE ORGANIZATION. YOU SEE, I ENJOY THE CONSTANT STRUGGLE OF THE STRONG OPPRESSING THE WEAK. AS A SUPERIOR, I DESTROY ALL THAT IS WEAK, OR OPPOSE MY REALITY.
I AM WHAT MOST FOOLS CALL EVIL. I AM POWER! THAT IS WHY YOU MUST DIE!
BUT WE'LL CONTINUE THIS CONVERSATION LATER EXCUSE ME
eh?
THE HARLEQUIN'S GONE... BUT THE ROPES... STILL... TIED. MORGOTH! THE CLOWNS ESCAPED!

HAVE A CARE, MAN! THE HARLEQUIN IS NO CLOWN!
ALERT THE OTHERS. BRING ME THE HARLEQUINS HEAD!
SO THE GAME BEGINS.
MORGOTH DEMANDS IMMEDIATE EXTERMINATION
TAKE NO CHANCES!
THE ULTIMATE FIGHTING MACHINE HE CALLED HIM
GOOD GOD
INCREDIBLE!

EXERCISE EXTREME CAUTION! YOU SAW WHAT HE DID TO THE OTHERS.
UP THERE!! I JUST SAW HIM!
ARREE!
YIIEE!


DAMN! JAMMED UP!
CLUNK
SILENCE... IS BROKEN BY SOFT FOOT FALLS
...FOLLOWED BY BLAZING...
...DESTRUCTION!
BLAM
BUM BUM

NOOOOO!! THAT'S WRONG! ALL WRONG! BE GONE FOOLS! ALL OF YOU! GET OUT! GET OUT!
THIS WAS NOT THE WAY THE GAME WAS TO END. NOT TO FALL VICTOM TO SUCH A SIMPLE TRAP
NOT YOU!
Wha.. THE BODY.. VANISHED.
eh?
Ah YES!
BUNT

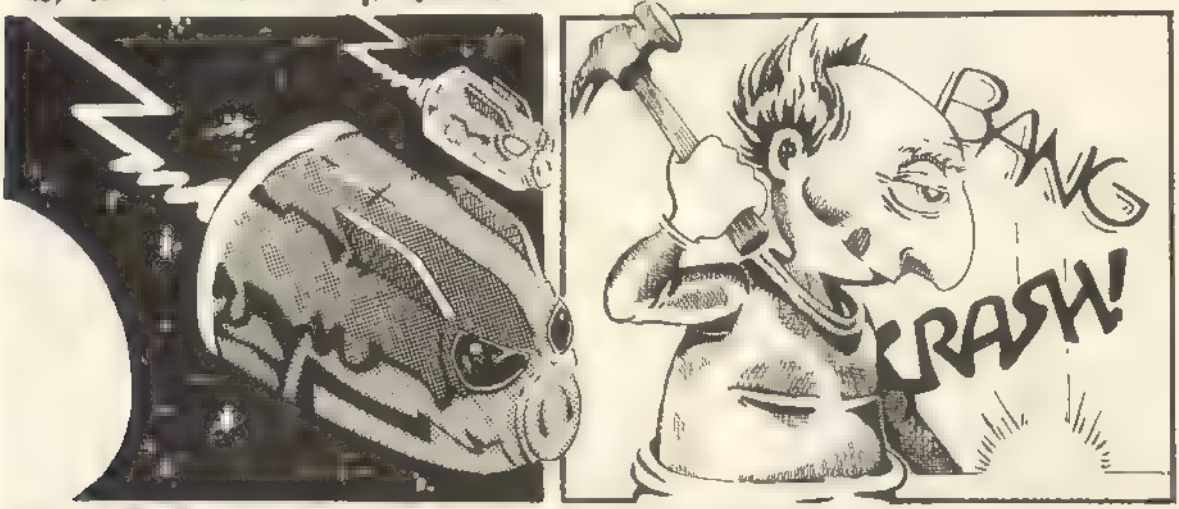
BRAVO
AN EXCELLENT PLOY! INDEED EXCELLENT. DON'T LOOK SO DUMB STRUCK. I'M SIMPLY USING A ROBOT.
I'M MUCH TOO SHY TO MAKE ANY PUBLIC APPEARANCES
BUT YOU! TELEKINETICS/LEVITATION, DEMATERIALIZATION AND A BIZARRE FORM OF ASTRAL PROJECTION.
I PRESUME IT WAS AN ASTRAL PROJECTION MY MEN BLASTED.
A MOST IMPRESSIVE PERFORMANCE.
HOWEVER I FEAR THIS GAME HAS COME TO AN END. THIS NIGHT WE HAVE BOTH DIED, YET LIVE TO BATTLE ANOTHER DAY.
BUT, YOU STAND THE TRIUMPHANT LOSER. FOR THIS NIGHT YOU HAVE BEEN BETRAYED BY LOVE AND YOUR INNOCENCE TARNISHED.

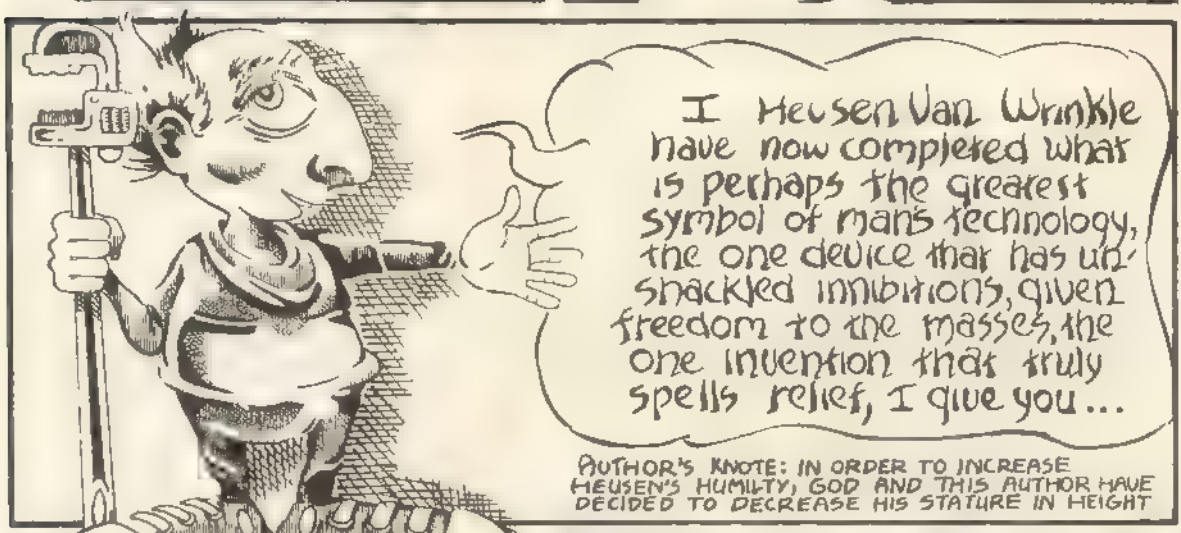
HARLEQUIN, YOUR HELL HAS JUST BEGUN. IT IS YOUR CHOICELESS PATH! WHAT PLACE IS THERE IN THIS WORLD FOR AN ARTIFICIAL MAN WHO FIGHTS ALONE FOR AN INSANE DREAM?
I'VE ANOTHER QUESTION: WHAT IF, BY WHATEVER MEANS THE SCALE SHIFTS? CAN THERE EVER BE TOO MUCH GOOD? AND IF YOU ARE THE BALANCE WOULD YOU NOT SEEK TO AGAIN BALANCE THE SCALE?
THINK ABOUT IT.
CLICK

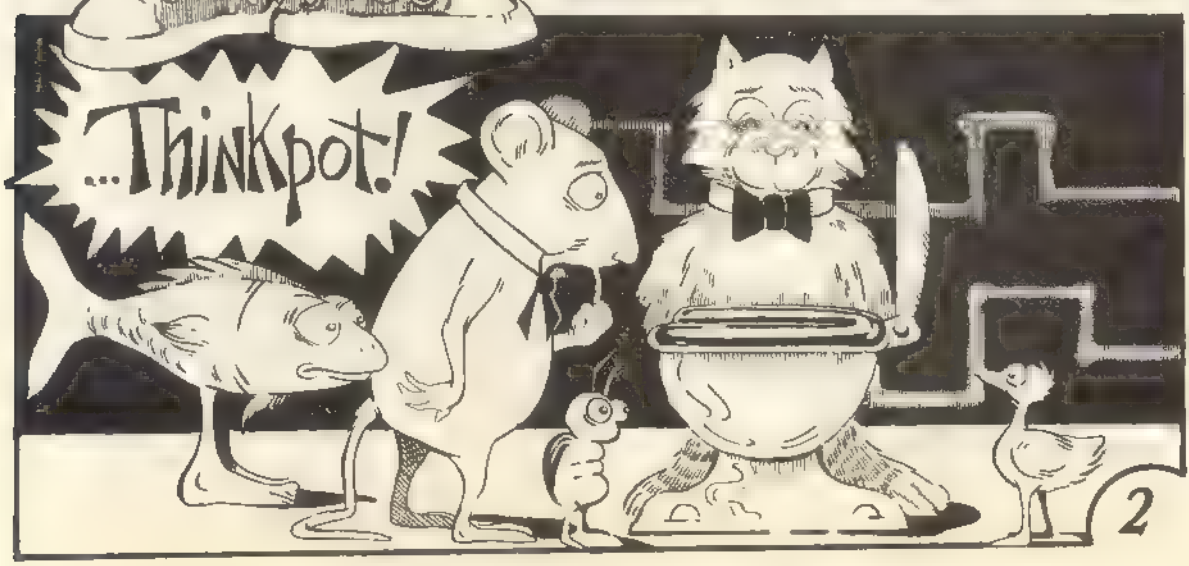
ARC
We are now only 20000 Mega-jumps from Earth, Admiral Bacon!
Excellent News, Major Gruesense! (chortle) Let us hope that when we touch down we can find a place to pork!
© 1978 JAMES DOMBROWSKI
JAMES DOMBROWSKI

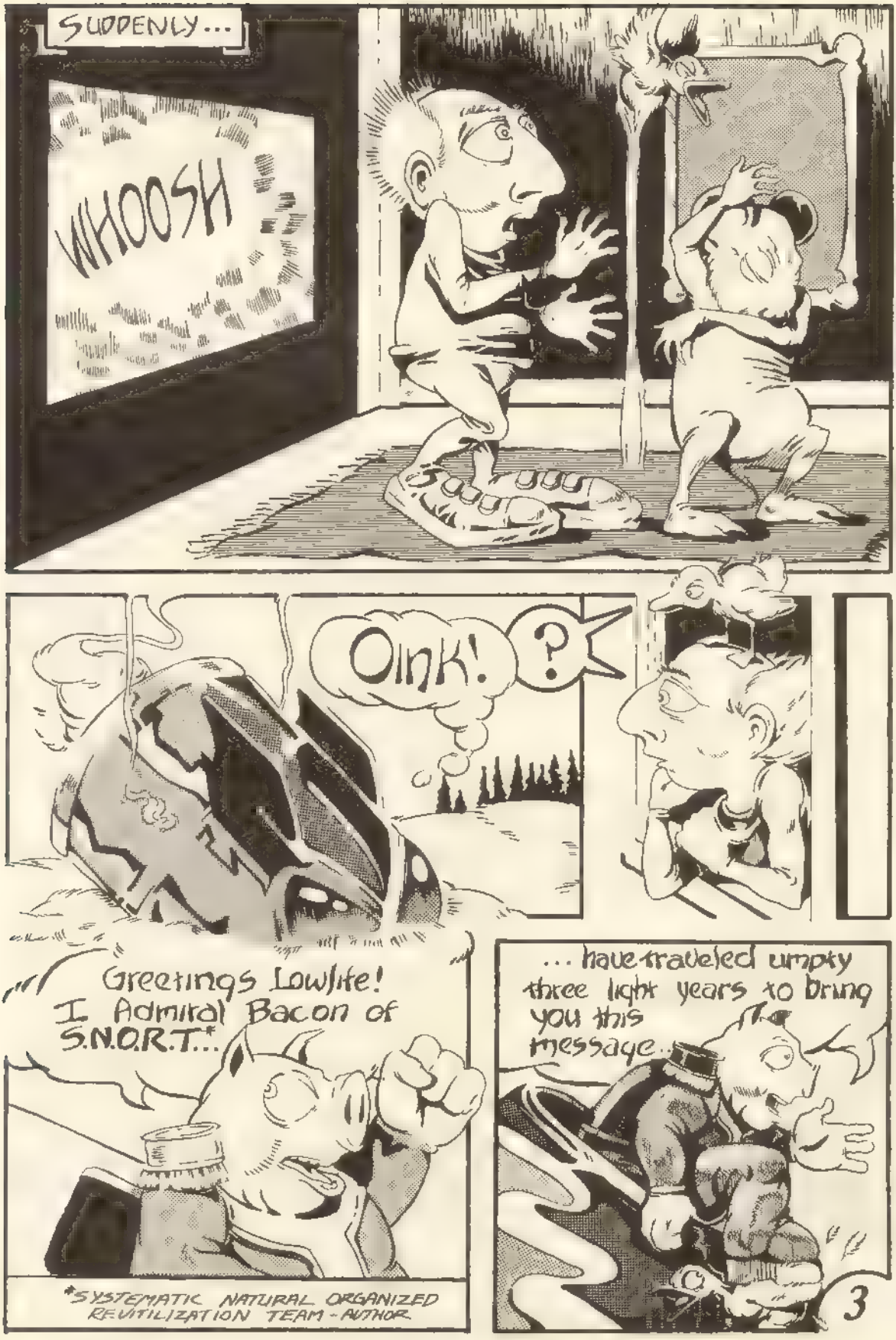
Sinister schemes a-bound in the air from a squadron of ships known as the Pickled Pigs Fleet

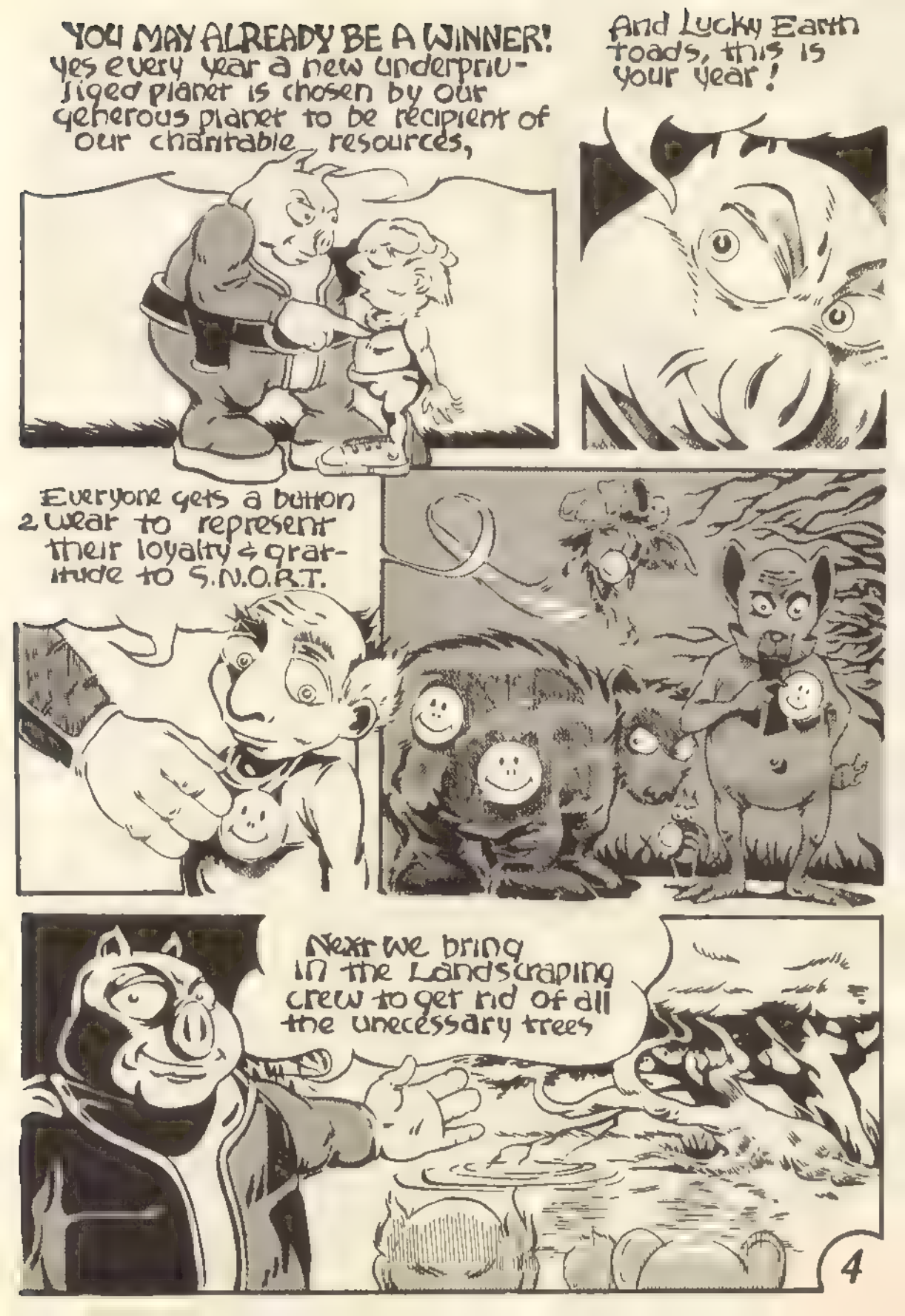
Meanwhile the inhabitants of a new Earth continue to repuild

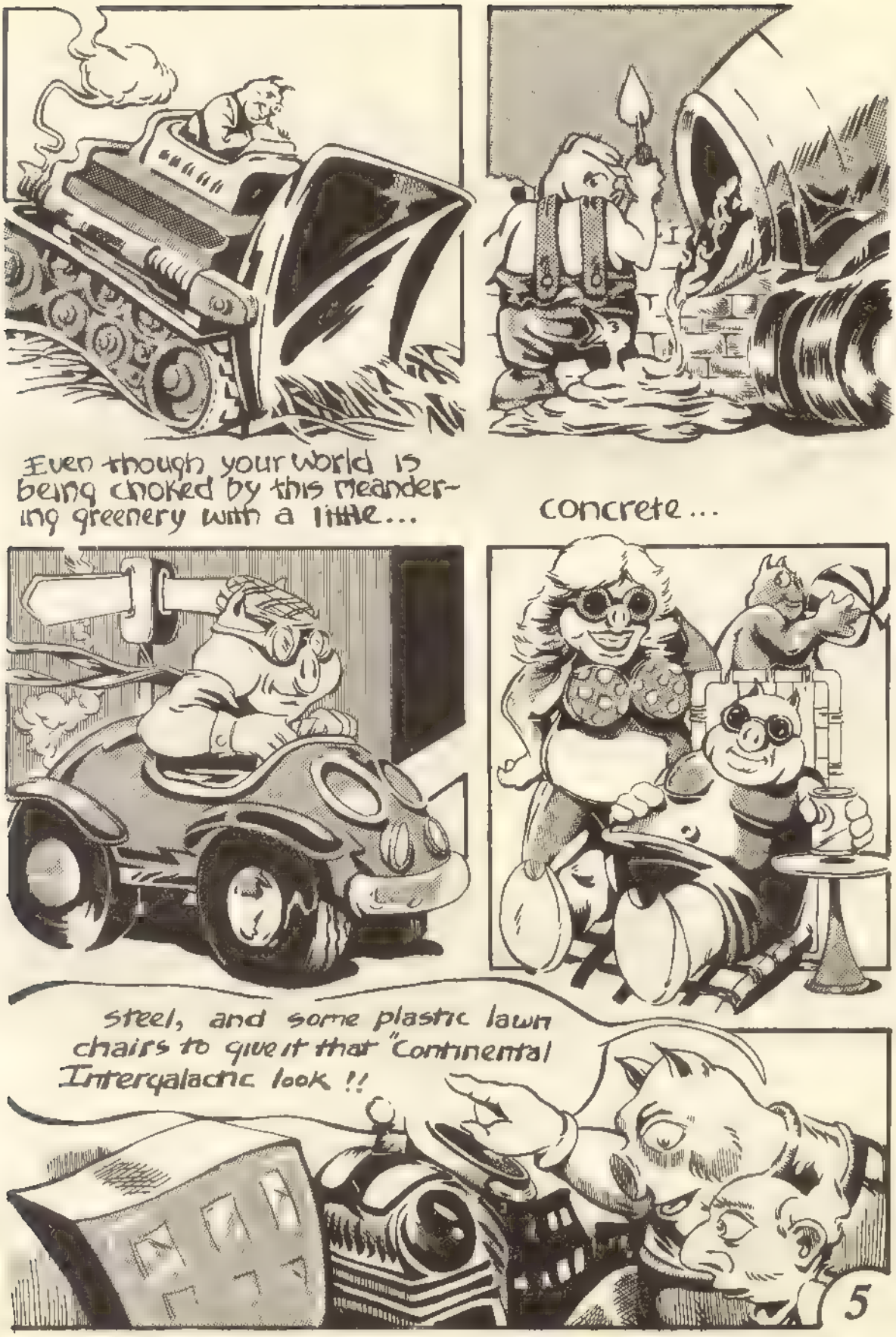



I Heusen Van Wrinkle have now completed what is perhaps the greatest symbol of mans technology, the one device that has un-shackled inhibitions, given freedom to the masses, the one invention that truly spells relief, I give you...
AUTHOR'S KNOTE: IN ORDER TO INCREASE HEUSEN'S HUMILITY, GOD AND THIS AUTHOR HAVE DECIDED TO DECREASE HIS STATURE IN HEIGHT



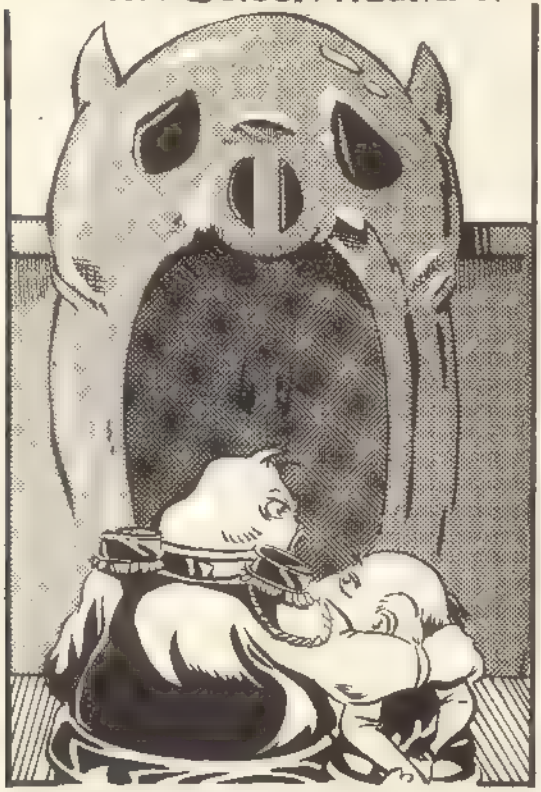

SUDDENLY...
WHOOSH
OINK!
?
Greetings Lowlife! I Admiral Bacon of S.N.O.R.T.*...
*SYSTEMATIC NATURAL ORGANIZED REVITILIZATION TEAM - AUTHOR
...have traveled umpty three light years to bring you this message.
3

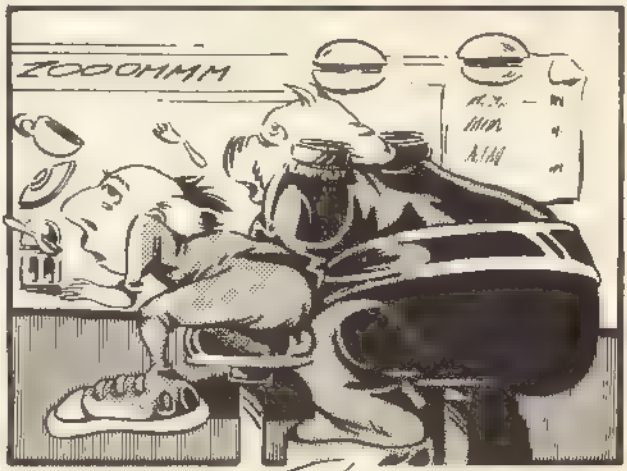

YOU MAY ALREADY BE A WINNER!
yes every year a new underprivi-liged planet is chosen by our generous planet to be recipient of our charitable resources,
And Lucky Earth toads, this is your year!
Everyone gets a button 2 wear to represent their loyalty & gratitude to S.N.O.R.T.
Next we bring in the Landscraping crew to get rid of all the unecessary trees
4


Even though your world is being choked by this meandering greenery with a little...
concrete...
steel, and some plastic lawn chairs to give it that "Continental Intergalactic look !!

Within a few hours, dinner at "the Golden Haunches."

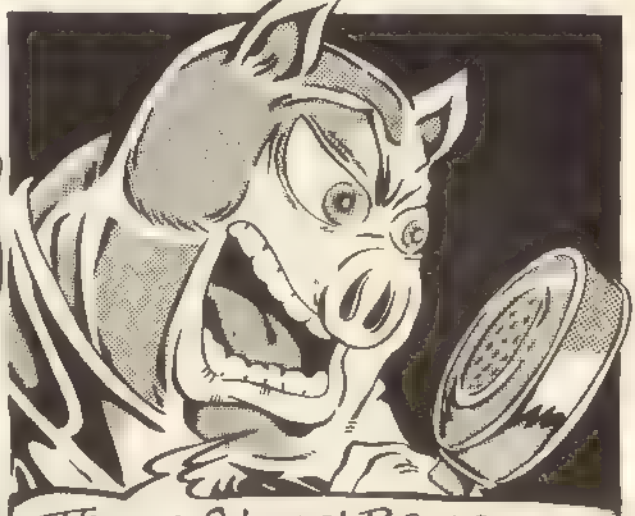
Two Leaping Bungtwat burgers and hold the Lizard phlegm sauce and make it snappy toots





One ulcer later...

I thought you might enjoy a little mastication, but come with me now as I deliver my first "FATE of the UNION" address



This is Admiral Bacon speaking to you from General Hindquarters, you are probably asking yourself what insignificant cretins like yourselves can do to show..

.. gratitude to S.N.O.R.T., we only ask that you daily attend our work camps
Oh yeah, and what if we refuse?!!
AHAHAHAHHHA
Should any of you foolishly disagree, we have provided you with a team of experts in the methods of persuasion - "The SUMO INTELLECTUALS!!"
Urgh;
Everyone will report to the Silent Sector Monday Morning for special re-education classes...

Soon dissension strikes...
Can't you see what is happening here?! We are going to turn back into what brought our downfall before, We must take up arms against this oppression...
Let's go son this can only mean trouble!
As the sun sinks so does Heusen's heart
Come quickly Hen!
BIG BROTHER
THING OVER YOU!
The last panel but definitely not...
The End

LETTERS

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EDITORIALS

Sorry folks but it's got to be brief this ish...

Sirs,
I am a faithful reader and collector of underground comics. I have read A+PLUS and I want more! Please send all possible information on all of your publications, catalogs, comic book lists, etc..

Pvt. Robyn A. Hochstetler 139-48-5268 USA Det. PSC to Box 1986 Lowry, AFB, Col. 80230

Dear Kevin,
Thought I'd drop you a line and give you my thoughts on issue #4. A quick perusal shows, that besides consistently coming out on time, your size and at least two strong continuing features (STORM-RAM II and PARAPHERNALIA) point up to a mag that seems to be establishing itself well. Also liked your ad for the HARLEQUIN which I eagerly await.
It seems only two things in the entire issue bother me- the cover for one and that photo on the inside back cover (a photo in a graphic story mag?). As far as the cover goes how about doing a subject related to the interiors? Issues 1 and 2 did it but not 3 or 4; what gives guys?

Mike Taubin
Akron, Ohio

Kevin,
I liked issue number 4, but I definitely see a "house style" developing. I think it's time for some new blood, in terms of art styles, etc.. For some reason I really like the artwork on "The Chosen". Either Kwiatkowski has improved, or you inked in a very linear style- which I like.
Keep it up.

Ruben- George Toyos
North Bergen, N.J.

Our desire to expand, improve and explore continues to take us in a universe of new directions. For our sixth issue, all humor special we've really put our heads together. (What do we think about some of the ideas for issue six, besides great?) Hilarious, wild, zany, stupid and occasionally subtle might come close to it. We're sure that after you see it you'll say we're MAD! Check it out at the end of September.
There's some serious thinking going on for the seventh issue; something not to be talked about lightly. Let me just say that a new mythic masterpiece is in the offing and perhaps a surprise appearance by a well known artist. More about 7 in issue 6.
Monthly Detroit (Detroits' own brand new version of New York magazine) is running an article in its June issue about MEGATON PRODUCTIONS! It's written by Fred King (who just sent me an invitation to a private reading of his article) and will include illustrations from past issues.
Speaking of past issues (ahem)- well? Do I really have to say it? Oh, alright. Back issues are available and going quickly. Dealer rates are available on request. You will buy!
I really can't leave without saying a few things about the Christopher Enterprises posters and portfolios advertised in this issue. The posters (18x24) and portfolios (12x16) are printed on high quality stock. They're superb! When you consider they originally sold at $3 and $25 respectively- it's a steal...

A+PLUS

Dear Mr.
My name is Kathy Ann Smith and I am 9 years old. I like your magazine a lot But don't you think that the onomatopoeia isn't exhibited in your graphic stories might prove incomprehensible to the prepubescent mind?
I asked my dog Coco and he said 'Arf. Bark. Arf' which means 'yes'
Bye Bye.
Kathy Ann Smith

yes folks, even Coco will love our 6th ALL HUMOR ISSUE!"

*OUT IN SEPT.

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DOWN TO THE LAST MAN

WRITING AND PENCILS- BRIAN SIEMBIEDA
INKS AND LETTERS - KEVIN SIEMBIEDA
LETTERING ASSISTS - J. OSTEN / INKING ASSIST - J. DOMBROWSKI

IT HAS BEEN WRITTEN IN THE "BOOK OF THE PROPHETS" THAT WHEN CIVIL STRIFE BECOMES UNBEARABLE AND NOTHING HAS GONE UNMARRED BY WAR THERE SHALL BE BORN TO THE ELVEN TRIBES ONE WHO WILL BRING ABOUT PEACE AMONG THE RACES OF URAN SO THAT THEY MAY ASCEND FROM DESPAIR BACK INTO THE LIGHT. THE MOON SHINING RED BETWIXT THE DOOM MOUNTAINS SHALL HERALD HIS COMING AND OF THIS IT IS SAID THE WHOLE WORLD WILL TAKE NOTE.

IT IS AN UNBEARABLY ARID PARCHED LAND WHERE THE SUN BEATS DOWN UNRELENTLESSLY AS HOT BLASTS OF WIND STIR THE EVER SHIFTING SANDS OVER THE BLEACHED BONES OF THE DEAD..

YET THE RUMOR OF HIS BIRTH HAS SUMMONED FORTH HUGE THRONGS OF THE BELIEVERS ON A HOLY PILGRIMAGE HEEDLESS OF THE BURNING DAYS, FREEZING NIGHTS AND THE WIND THAT HOWLS THROUGH THE CRAGS LIKE A THOUSAND LOST SOULS. EVEN THE WEALTHY AND THOSE OF ROYAL LINEAGE HAVE BRAVED THE JOURNEY SO THAT THEY MIGHT PRESENT GIFTS TO THE HOLY FAMILY WHO RESIDE IN A TOWN OUTPOST CRUMBLING NEAR THE RADIOACTIVE WASTES.

ONE OTHER HAS ALSO COME... AND FOR THAT CIVILIZATION MAY FOREVER MORN. FOR HE IS THE "LAST MAN" THE SOLE SURVIVOR OF THE PROUD HUMAN RACE WHOSE NOBLE PEOPLE WERE WIPED OUT IN THE "HOLY WAR" WAGED BY THE RELIGIOUSLY BIASED ELVES SEEKING TO ERADICATE WHAT THEY CONSIDERED DECADENT PHILOSOPHERS AND ALTHOUGH THE CONFLICT RAPED A WORLD, THE HOPELESSLY OUTNUMBERED HUMAN RACE FELL. ALL THAT IS SAVE ONE.

TOGETHER WITH BUT TWO ROBOTS WE SHALL BRING ABOUT MORE CHAOS AND ANGUISH THAN MY ROBOT HORDES HAVE EVER INFLICTED. YET MOST FITTING IS THAT I, WHO HAVE SUFFERED SO FROM THEIR PIOUS PREJUDICE BE THE ONE TO CRUSH THIS WOULD-BE SAVIOR!

©1978 BRIAN SIEMBIEDA

YOU TWO!!
HALT AND STATE YOUR BUSINESS
BE AT PEACE BROTHER. WE MEAN YOU NO HARM, BUT RATHER SEEK ENTRY INTO YOUR FAIR CITY TO OBTAIN ENLIGHTENMENT
THAT'S OUT OF THE QUESTION. WITH THE CITY ALREADY CRAWLING WITH FANATICS THE LAST THING WE NEED IS AN OVER GROWN MUTANT AND SOME DERELICT ELF.
THEN WE'LL TROUBLE YOU NO MORE BUT BEFORE WE GO EASE MY ..oh... CURIOUSITY.
I COULD NOT HELP NOTICING THAT YOU ARE OUT OF THE VIEWING RANGE OF THE MACHINE GUN NESTS. AREN'T YOU FEARFUL OF BEING STRUCK DOWN AT THE CITIES VERY GATES?!?
BY WHO?! WHO'D BE CRAZY ENOUGH TO SNEAK 100 MILES BEHIND OUR LINES.
PERHAPS THE LAST MAN?
THAT COWARD!? HE'S TOO BUSY HIDING IN HIS FORTRESS!
Oh?
OH MY GOD!!
IT'S THE LAST MAN
PFFFT PFFFT
THIS MESSIAH BUSINESS SITS ILL WITH ME, KAL. IT BODES OF REVOLUTION!
FEAR NOT MY FRIEND. I'VE TAKEN PRECAUTIONS TO ASURE THAT THE SUPPOSED NEW WAY SHAL NEVER BE.
2.

EVEN AS WE SPEAK A SMALL, BUT HIGHLY TRAINED UNIT OF OUR MOST TRUSTED SOLDIERS, LED BY GENERAL KRAKIN MOVE INTO POSITION TO SNUFF OUT THIS POTENTIAL THREAT TO THE EMPIRE.
WELL LAST MAN, BY NOW THE ROBOTS HAVE TAKEN THE MACHINE-GUN NESTS, BUT HOW DO WE FIND THE CHILD?
PERHAPS THAT OLD VAGRANT CAN HELP US OUT.
WAKE UP, OLD FOOL!!
Who WHAT DO YOU WANT OF ME GOOD SIRS?
WE MERELY SEEK INFORMATION.
WHERE MIGHT WE FIND THE NEWBORN SAVIOR?
MORE WEALTHY STRANGERS BEARING GIFTS, eh?
WELL..THEIR HOME LIES YONDER.
EXCELLENT! COME RENEGADE. WE HAVE AN APPOINTMENT TO KEEP.
THAT IS AFTER WE SPARE THIS PITIFUL CREATURE OF THE BURDEN OF GROWING STILL OLDER!
HUHH?
BLAM! BLAM!

IN FIVE MINUTES THE OPERATION BEGINS. SO REMEMBER STRIKE HARD AND FAST! THEN SPLIT-UP AND WE'LL RENDEZVOUS WITH THE GENERAL AND THE REST OF THE SQUAD OUTSIDE THE CITY.
ABOVE ALL, THE GOVERNMENT MUST NOT BE IMPLICATED! NO WITNESSES ARE TO BE LEFT ALIVE !!
YOUR POUNDING DISTURBS THE CHILD SIR. WHAT DO YOU SEEK? WHO ARE YOU?!
I AM HE WHO BEARS THE GREATEST OF ALL JOYS. YET.. TO MANY I AM THE MOST DREADED OF ALL ILLS
THEN TELL ME, GOOD SIR, WHAT IS YOUR NAME?
SNAP
DEATH!!
4.

OH MY GOD!! IT'S THE LAST MAN!
OUT OF MY WAY, DOLT!
LAST MAN, DON'T WASTE TIME! FIND THE KID. I'LL FINISH OFF THESE TWO.
BRACK!
DIE MURDERER!
WAP

CLACK!
SPARE HIM! Oh.. PLEASE SPA.
BEGONE WOMAN!
LOOK LONG AND HARD, RENEGADE FOR 23 YEARS OF ANGUISH AND LONELINESS ARE ABOUT TO BE AVENGED.
HEADS UP PEOPLE! IT'S TIME TO DIE!.. & GOOD LORD THE LAST MAN!
WHAM
WHAT THE..
BLAM POW
KAPOW
KAPOW
KAPOW

WE'RE HOPELESSLY OUTNUMBERED! GRAB THE KID AND LETS GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE!!
THE GRENADE DIDN'T FINISH THEM ALL OFF. THEY'RE RIGHT ON OUR TRAIL!
KEEP RUNNING! THEY'LL SLOW DOWN WHEN THEY DASH HEAD LONG INTO OUR TRAP AND THE ROBOTS CATCH THEM IN A WITHERING CROSSFIRE.
7.

LAST MAN WHAT ARE WE GONNA DO? THEY'VE FORGOTTEN THE KID AND NOW EVERYONES AFTER *YOUR HEAD!* WITH THE *ROBOTS DESTROYED* THEY'LL BE ON OUR TRAIL IN NOTHING FLAT!!
WE'LL HAVE TO UTILIZE PLAN B AND TAKE *SEPERATE ESCAPE* ROUTES TO MAKE IT HARDER TO TRACK US DOWN
BLAM

SIR, THE ROBOTS HAVE BEEN DISPATCHED.
EXCELLENT!
RADIO THE GENERAL SO WE CAN CUT OFF THE LAST MANS ESCAPE.

PUFF. PUFF. DAMN!!
THIS ATMOSPHERE IS TOO *THIN* FOR SOMEONE MY SIZE. I IT'S SLOWING ME DOWN. *WHAT THE..* !? THEY CAUGHT UP SOONER THAN I ANTICIPATED!

WELL, IT'S OF LITTLE CONSEQUENCE MY AVENUE OF ESCAPE LIES JUST BEYOND THIS CORNER.

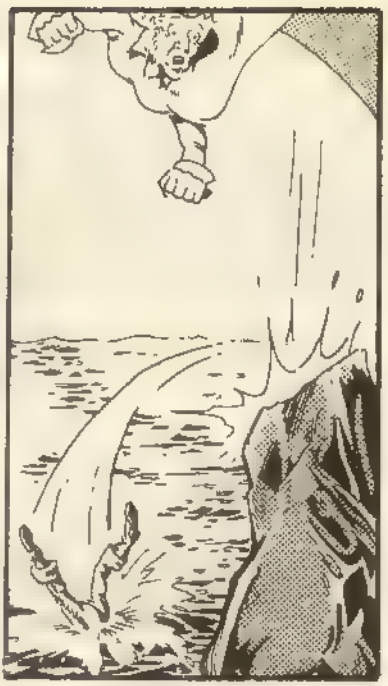
Oh.... no.... THE.... SUSPENSION BRIDGE WAS *DESTROYED* IN A.. ROCK SLIDE.

C'MON ELVES! HE'S JUST AROUND THE CORNER!

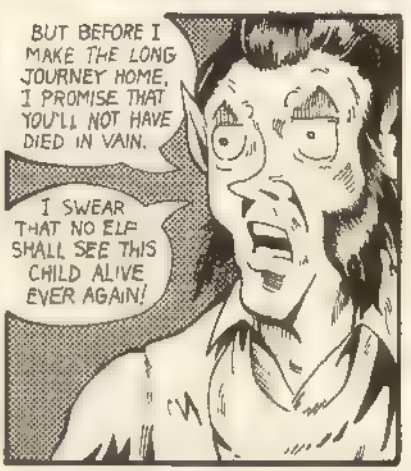
KAPOW!

I'LL TEACH THAT BASTARD SOMEONE HAND ME A GRENADE!
WITH PLEASURE
OH MY GOD!!
WHAT THE.
THOSE RATS RADIOED FOR RE-INFORCEMENTS AND WITH THE LEDGE BEHIND ME DESTROYED I CAN ONLY GO UP
YOU TWO, SCAN THOSE CLIFFS FOR HIM. AND HE BETTER NOT SLIP BY YOU!
THERE HE IS! BEHIND THOSE ROCKS! I CAN SEE PART OF HIS CAPE
ZZZIP!
ZING
LOOKS LIKE IT'S THE LAST ROUND-UP
LAST MAN, THIS IS GENERAL KRAKIN SPEAKING!... SURRENDER!! YOU CAN'T ESCAPE!
GENERAL KRAKIN!
MY BRETHREN!! DO YOU HEAR?!? IT'S KRAKIN THE BUTCHER, WHO SEEKS MY DEATH! HE WHO'S ATROCITIES AGAINST OUR PEOPLE GO YET UNPUNISHED. IT IS HE WHO SEEKS HUMAN TIES FINAL SURRENDER!!

LET THIS BE OUR ANSWER!
A TRULY IMPRESSIVE DISPLAY OF FIGHTING ABILITY BUT SURELY YOU NEVER EXPECTED TO ESCAPE!
ESCAPE!?
WHATEVER MADE YOU THINK I WAS TRYING TO ESCAPE?
STAY BACK! DON'T TRY ANYTHING! YOU MADMAN! YOU'RE KNOCKING US OFF THE CLIFF!
10



I'VE WAITED FAR TO LONG ALREADY FOR YOU TO MEET ME HERE LAST MAN..
I CAN HEAR THE ENEMY SEARCHING FOR ME
I.. CHOKE.. REALIZE NOW I'LL NEVER SEE YOU AGAIN!


BUT BEFORE I MAKE THE LONG JOURNEY HOME, I PROMISE THAT YOU'LL NOT HAVE DIED IN VAIN.
I SWEAR THAT NO ELF SHALL SEE THIS CHILD ALIVE EVER AGAIN!

A RACE MOURNS THE DEATH OF THEIR GENERAL WHILE A WORLD CRYS FOR THE LOSS OF THEIR CHILD SAVIOR

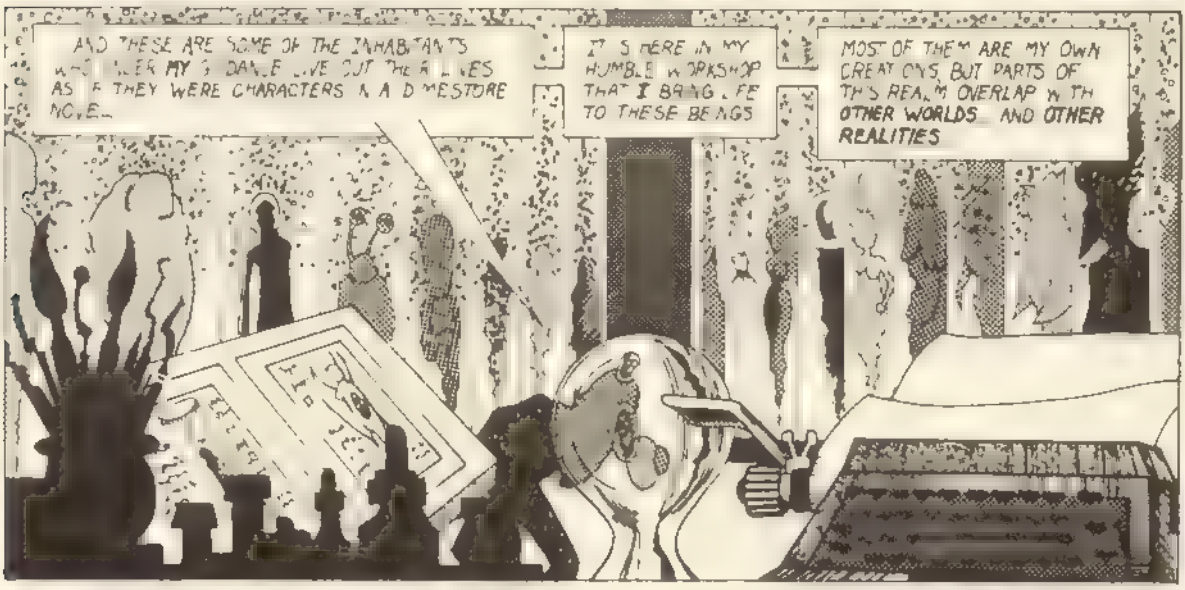
BUT WHO MOURNS FOR YOU... LAST MAN?

YOUR PEOPLE HAVE ALL TOO LONG AGO CRUMBLED INTO DUST LEAVING DESPAIR, LONLINESS AND MALICE YOUR CONSTANT COMPANIONS AND THE KILLING OF THE ENEMY A HOLLOW PLEASURE...

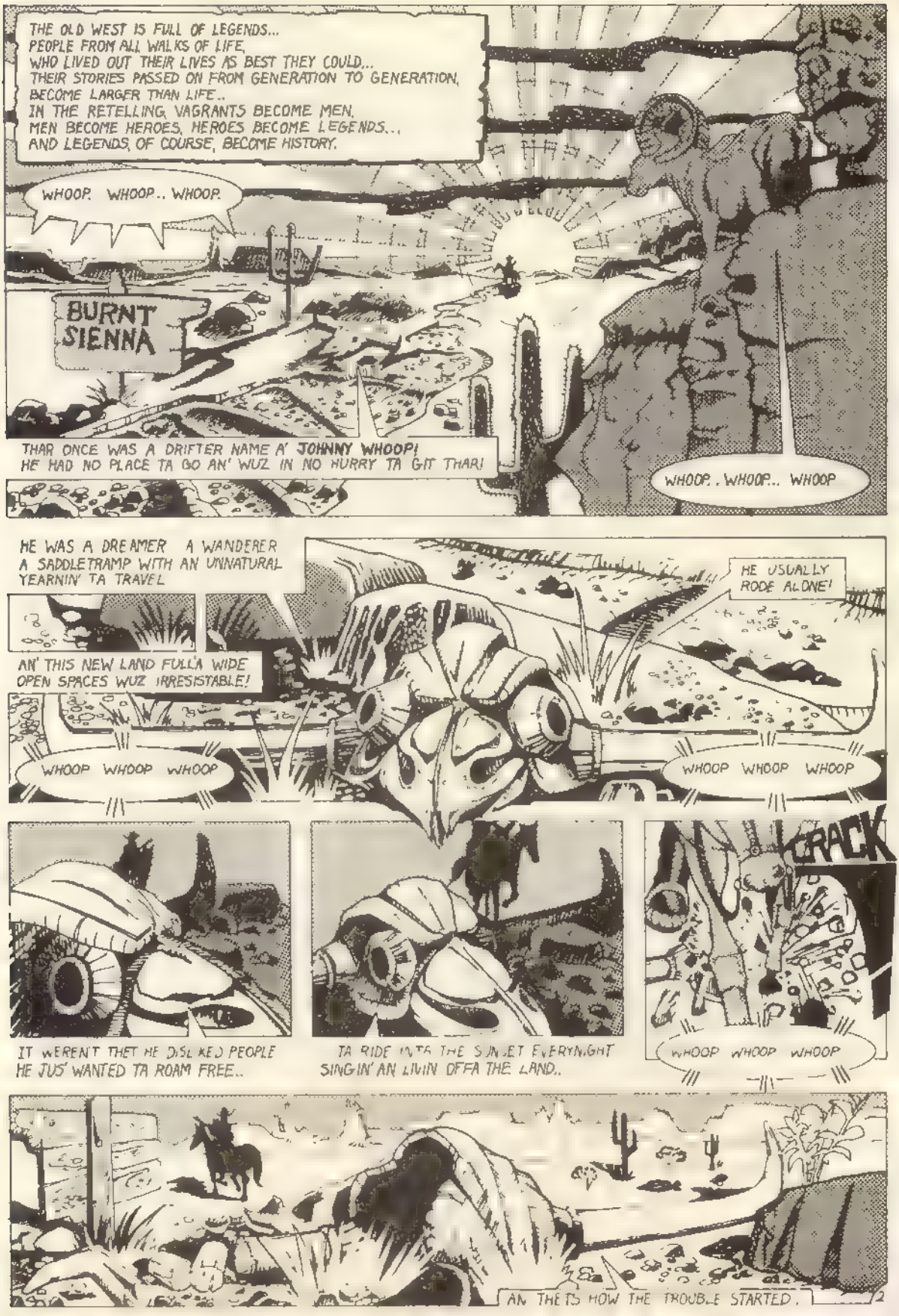
BUT FEAR NOT, FOR A TIRED LITTLE ELF MOURNS THE PASSING OF HIS ONLY FRIEND...

AS DO TWO ELDERLY MUTANTS IN THE RADIOACTIVE WASTES WHO NOW HAVE A CHILD TO EASE THE BOREDOM AND BURDEN OF THEIR OLD AGE.

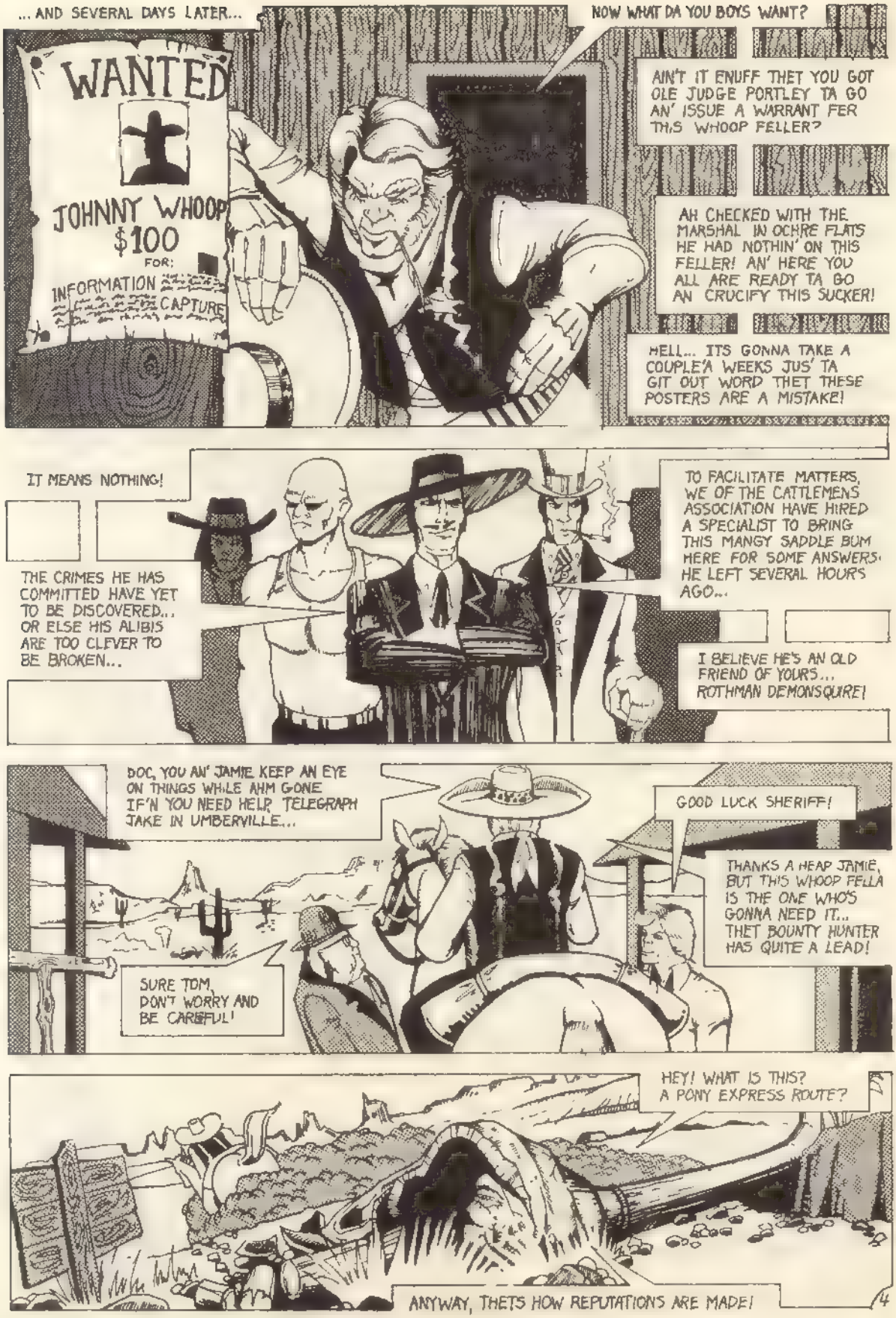
And now a word from the overseer...


AND THESE ARE SOME OF THE INHABITANTS WHO LIVE IN MY SMALL LIVE OUT THEIR LIVES AS IF THEY WERE CHARACTERS IN A DIORAMA STORE NOVEL...
IT IS HERE IN MY HUMBLE WORKSHOP THAT I BRING LIFE TO THESE BEINGS
MOST OF THEM ARE MY OWN CREATIONS, BUT PARTS OF THIS REALM OVERLAP WITH OTHER WORLDS AND OTHER REALITIES

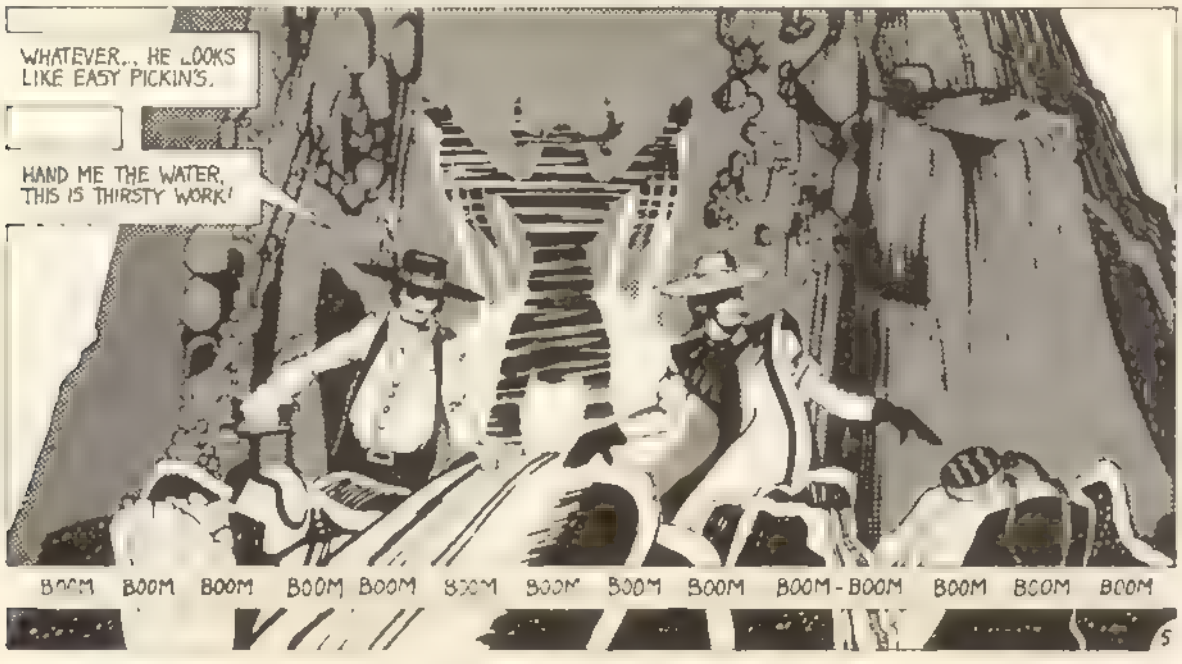
...SUCH AS HERE... THESE CREATURES WERE BORN AND BRED BETWEEN TWO SEPARATE BUT SIMILAR DIMENSIONS AND THEY WERE JUST THE BEGINNING!
MY NAME IS JAMES ALLEN OSTEN.
AND THIS IS MY WORLD
© '78


THE OLD WEST IS FULL OF LEGENDS...
PEOPLE FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE,
WHO LIVED OUT THEIR LIVES AS BEST THEY COULD,...
THEIR STORIES PASSED ON FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION,
BECOME LARGER THAN LIFE...
IN THE RETELLING, VAGRANTS BECOME MEN,
MEN BECOME HEROES, HEROES BECOME LEGENDS...
AND LEGENDS, OF COURSE, BECOME HISTORY.
WHOOP. WHOOP.. WHOOP.
BURNT SIENNA
THAR ONCE WAS A DRIFTER NAME A' JOHNNY WHOOP!
HE HAD NO PLACE TA GO AN' WUZ IN NO HURRY TA GIT THAR!
WHOOP. WHOOP... WHOOP
HE WAS A DREAMER A WANDERER
A SADDLETRAMP WITH AN UNNATURAL
YEARNIN' TA TRAVEL
HE USUALLY RODE ALONE!
AN' THIS NEW LAND FULLA WIDE
OPEN SPACES WUZ IRRESISTABLE!
WHOOP WHOOP WHOOP
WHOOP WHOOP WHOOP
IT WERENT THET HE DISLIKED PEOPLE
HE JUS' WANTED TA ROAM FREE..
TA RIDE INTA THE SUNSET EVERYNIGHT
SINGIN' AN LIVIN OFFA THE LAND..
CRACK
WHOOP WHOOP WHOOP
AN THETS HOW THE TROUBLE STARTED.

AND AS THE IRON HORSE LEAVES ITS MARK ACROSS THIS LAND, PEOPLE ALL OVER THIS COUNTRY WILL VISIT OUR FAIR CITY AND ECONOMIC PROSPERITY WILL FOLLOW!
CIGARS...
YOU KNOW, TOM, THET B. P CAPITA IS ONE HECK OF A BUSINESS MAN!
THETS TRUE DOC, BUT AH STILL THINK HE'S LOOKIN' OUT FER HIS OWN GOOD MORN' FER THIS TOWN!
HOWEVER MY FELLOW CITIZENS ONE WELL SPREAD BAD IMPRESSION COULD SERIOUSLY DAMAGE THE FUTURE GROWTH OF OUR CITY!
I'M SPEAKING OF ONE UNCIVILIZED SADDLE TRAMP WHO PATRONIZED OUR POOREST EXAMPLE OF HOSPITALITY AND SUBSTANCE!
HECK WHATS IT MATTER WHAT HIS MOTIVES ARE AS LONG AS HE'S HELPING OUT THE REST OF US?
AH KNOW FROM BITTER EXPERIENCE IT'LL BRING MORE BAD THEN GOOD!
NOW HOLD ON BARNEY, MY PLACE AIN'T THAT BAD!
TO INSURE THE GROWTH OF OUR COMMUNITY DRASTIC MEASURES MUST BE TAKEN...
AFTER ALL, THAT COWBOY WAS THE FIRST AND LAST VISITOR THIS TOWN HAS HAD SINCE ELVERNA MEANY HAD HER TRIPLETS!
DANG IT ALL DOC AH KIN SEE WHAR THIS IS ALL GONNA LEAD TA...
EASY SHERIFF, EVERY MAN HAS A RIGHT TO SPEAK HIS PIECE!
IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF THIS COMMUNITY, THAT MAN SHOULD BE BROUGHT IN FOR QUESTIONING! WHY... FOR ALL WE KNOW, HE MAY BE A WANTED OUTLAW!
BLAST IT DOC! SEE WHAT AH MEAN?
NOW HOLD ON!
YER ALL MAKIN' SOMETHIN' OUTA NUTHIN'!


... AND SEVERAL DAYS LATER...
WANTED
JOHNNY WHOOP
$100
FOR:
INFORMATION
CAPTURE
NOW WHAT DA YOU BOYS WANT?
AIN'T IT ENUFF THET YOU GOT OLE JUDGE PORTLEY TA GO AN' ISSUE A WARRANT FER THIS WHOOP FELLER?
AH CHECKED WITH THE MARSHAL IN OCHRE FLATS HE HAD NOTHIN' ON THIS FELLER! AN' HERE YOU ALL ARE READY TA GO AN CRUCIFY THIS SUCKER!
HELL... ITS GONNA TAKE A COUPLE'A WEEKS JUS' TA GIT OUT WORD THET THESE POSTERS ARE A MISTAKE!
IT MEANS NOTHING!
THE CRIMES HE HAS COMMITTED HAVE YET TO BE DISCOVERED... OR ELSE HIS ALIBIS ARE TOO CLEVER TO BE BROKEN...
TO FACILITATE MATTERS, WE OF THE CATTLEMENS ASSOCIATION HAVE HIRED A SPECIALIST TO BRING THIS MANGY SADDLE BUM HERE FOR SOME ANSWERS. HE LEFT SEVERAL HOURS AGO...
I BELIEVE HE'S AN OLD FRIEND OF YOURS... ROTHMAN DEMONSQUIRE!
DOC, YOU AN' JAMIE KEEP AN EYE ON THINGS WHILE AHM GONE. IF'N YOU NEED HELP, TELEGRAPH JAKE IN UMBERVILLE...
GOOD LUCK SHERIFF!
THANKS A HEAP JAMIE, BUT THIS WHOOP FELLA IS THE ONE WHO'S GONNA NEED IT... THET BOUNTY HUNTER HAS QUITE A LEAD!
SURE TOM, DON'T WORRY AND BE CAREFUL!
HEY! WHAT IS THIS? A PONY EXPRESS ROUTE?
ANYWAY, THETS HOW REPUTATIONS ARE MADE!
4

...HMMM... THESE HOOFPRINTS ARE STILL SLIGHTLY WARM... TWO HOURS OLD. NO. MAKE THAT TWO HOURS, THREE AND A HALF MINUTES...
HE SEEMED TA BE IN A HURRY AN THEN HE STOPS
MEBBE HE'S CARRYING SOMETHIN IMPORTENT LIKE GOLD SILVER OR MONEY...
THEN AGIN, MEBBE HE'S LOOKIN' FER SOMETHIN' HE BURIED, LIKE... GOLD... SILVER OR MONEY!
BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM
BOOM BOOM-BOOM BOOM


WHATEVER.. HE LOOKS LIKE EASY PICKIN'S.
HAND ME THE WATER, THIS IS THIRSTY WORK!
BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM-BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM

BOOMBOOMBOOMBOOMBOOMBOOMBOOMBOOMBOOMBOOMBOOMBOOMBOOMBOOMBOOMBOOMBOOMBOOMBOOM
SAY, DO YOU HEAR DRUMS?
NAW... IT'S ONLY YER HEART THUMPIN'. YER NOT WORRIED 'BOUT GETTIN' CAUGHT?
THANK YOU ONCE AGAIN, GREAT NACOLA, MAY I PROVE MYSELF WORTHY!
NOW... MAY THE DEVIL WINDS CARRY ME FASTER THAN THE DEMON-SQUIRE... ON FLAMEWHISPER... FLY BOY!
—TO BE CONTINUED—
6

AWAKEN... MY LITTLE BEAUTIES...
.. YOU HAVE BEEN CREATED BECAUSE THIS WORLD NEEDS REAL WOMEN... NOT STUPID STEREOTYPES! YOU ARE THE BEGINNING OF A NEW BREED THAT WILL REVOLUTIONIZE THE COMIC UNIVERSE!
NONE OF YOU ARE THE PERFECT WOMAN, BUT ALL OF YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL IN YOUR OWN WAY... AND THAT IS GOOD FOR I WANT REAL, SOLID, THREE DIMENSIONAL CHARACTERS!
NOW... WHICH OF YOU WILL BE THE FIRST..
...TO SPEND AN EVENING WITH YOUR CREATOR?
I COMMAND YOU
EAT CAKE
CAKE NOTHING! HE CAN EAT DIRT!
NEXT, HE'LL WANT US TO WEAR METAL BRACELETS AND USE MAGIC LASSOS!
THATS RIGHT! STAR SPANGLED UNDERWEAR IS SO IN!

EVERY ARTIST MUST PAY CERTAIN DUES AND COMIC CREATORS ARE NO EXCEPTION! SO.. TO PROVE THAT I AM WHAT I CLAIM TO BE, I DUBIOUSLY PRESENT ONE OF MY CREATIONS AS HE APPEARS ON SOME PARALLEL WORLDS.. PUKE!
GRAMPS: OLD MAN!
the geezer who loves knees
ON EARTH Z-28
AHHH. C'MERE LIL' GIRL AND SIT ON YER GRAMPA'S KNEE!
ON EARTH ZOWIE
.. AHHH... C'MERE.. GURGLE..
ON EARTH XYZ
I'M TELLING YOU THAT BENCH PROPOSITIONED ME!
..AHHH.. WHAT A GRAMPA PLEASER!
..AND FINALLY ON OUR EARTH..
OHHH... LOOK AT THE MYSTERY LIGHTS!
THOSE ARE STARS, STUPID!
BRIGHT.. PRETTY..
AHHH... AT LEAST MY KNEES AREN'T COLD!
DONE!

Is your collection complete?

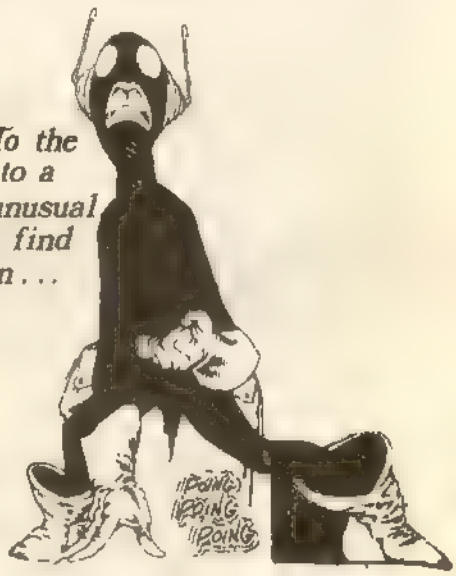
A+PLUS

A+PLUS 1. Our premier issue features a fine cover by MIKE NASSER; tales of Gods and men; alternate realities and madness.

GARGOYLES, WIZARDS, U.F.O.s, LAUGHS, ROBOTS, MYSTISM, YOYOS AND THE ACCLAIMED SF STRIP THE COMING OF MAN COMPRISE OUR SECOND ISSUE.

Embark into the realm of Fantasy unbound! To the turbulant world, Fertanna, the home of Stormram; to a bizarre plain of existance called Vaudevil and the unusual society of Cacaphony;...to Hell and back only to find Time slain! All this and MORE awaits you in...

A+PLUS 3!



68 Pages

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Art, and subsequently literature, has many definitions; I prefer the one that advances art as a recreation of reality. The literature of *fantasy* is concerned with the creation of secondary realities, with worlds that do not concretely exist to our sphere of existance, and yet, when well written, have an almost tangible coporeality. It is a sad statement of our time and culture that this once respectable genre remains fettered in a literary ghetto for juvenile mentalities in chains forged by hacksmiths who regard fantasy as little more than *macho* sword and sorcery

To surmount the banality that fantasy so often falls prey to, to transcend the simplistic and evolve into a truly secondary reality, a believable world made of the very best stuff of dreams is the monumental achievement of J.R.R. Tolkien. His testimony to that achievement is, of course, *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and finally, after a long wait, THE SILMARILLION.

For the benefit of those of you who've been living in a bathyscaph at the bottom of the Mariana Trench for the past year, THE SILMARILLION is the foundation stone of Tolkien's massive *Rings* trilogy, a dramatic narrative of the creation of Middle-earth and the events of the First Age. The body of the book, *Quenta Silmarillion*, is the chronicle of the Silmarils, three jewels containing the eternal light of the Two Trees of Valinor, the poisoning of the Trees by the fallen Vala and first Dark Lord Melkor, the theft of the Silmarils by Melkor and the resultant war waged against him for their return by the elf-prince Feanor, who created the jewels. Two following chapters tell of the Maia Sauron's rise to power, the sinking of Numenor, the forging of the Rings of Power and Sauron's first downfall, signaling the beginning of the Third Age and setting the stage for the War of the Ring

There are trolls, orcs, werewolves, dragons (dragons! — how I missed dragons in *The Lord of the Rings*) and Balrogs and other unappetizing denizens of the dark and there are elves and dwarves, gods and enchantments all woven together in a colorful tapestry of incredible but cohesive complexity. Yet, there is more to the perfect creation of a secondary world than supernatural foes and spell-hurling elves, which most practitioners of the genre seem to ignore.

Yes, THE SILMARILLION (as well as *The Lord of the Rings*) is an epic and it is a fantasy — but it is also a romance. Fantasy forms the substance of THE SILMARILLION, imaginary though it may be, but Romanticism provides the essence.

Romanticism is the category of literature (and art) that regards man as a conscious being with the power of volition. It is *not* represented by adolescent love stories, gothic mysteries, historical novels or the sword and sorcery tales mentioned disparagingly at the opening of this discussion. Unlike Naturalism, Romanticism evolved from the Aristotelian precept that art and literature should show life not as it is but what it can be. It does not deal with unimportant, journalistic minutiae but magnifies what *is* important: values, conviction, purpose. Because society deems these concepts as invalid in real life, they are relegated to the world of fantasy (as well as science-fiction) because the unbelievable is commonplace in the genre.

No, trolls and goblins do not lurk our streets — what does is far worse, and does so with impunity There are no fire belching dragons in the material sense — but there are metaphysical ones that spew out jingoisms and platitutes that threaten to eradicate what's left of society's mind

Romanticism delves into *abstracts*, not concretes. It is irrelevant if heroes find themselves in conflict with evil wizards or with politicians — or even if the heroes themselves are human or elf or halfling. The essence — the quality of a consciousness that refuses to break before the juggernaut of malevolence even when defeat seems inevitable — remains the same

In THE SILMARILLION, Fëanor invokes the wrath of the god-

like Valar to retrieve the stolen Silmarils, created by his own hand but with the Light of the Two Trees which were created by the Valar. In his war against Melkor, Fëanor stops at nothing to regain what he believes is his by right; Eventually he dies unrepentant, slain by the demonic Balrogs of the Great Enemy. Beren, for the love and hand of the elfmaid Lúthien, battles werewolves and Sauron himself to wrest a Silmaril from Melkor's iron crown, losing his life in the process. The children of Fëanor, driven by Fëanor's Oath strive to take the Silmarils and after years of warring, eventually win but only to come to grieveous ends — Maedhros dies in a fiery abyss and Maglor loses his sanity, wandering the sea shore in mad regret and pain.

The leitmotif of THE SILMARILLION is not what great values men (or elves) are fighting for. The "great" values the Elves fought for (the Silmarils) were not worth the many needless deaths and tragedies that occured during the War of the Great Jewels. Rather, what is created is a sense of what greatness conscious beings are capable of when they fight for values. This concept is consistant in THE SILMARILLION as it is in *The Lord of the Rings*.

It is significant to note that there are dozens of fantasy novels on the bookstands, yet virtually none of them (with the exception of *The Sword of Shannara*, a shameless imitation of *The Lord of the Rings*) have achieved the enduring success of Tolkien's works (THE SILMARILLION is still on the best-sellers list even as I write). It is more than a rainbow background, intricate though it may be, filled with things that go bump in the night, that make a good story Fantasy gives a story its substance, but it is the perception of the individual characters in their various conflicts, hates, fears, struggles and love that endow it with spirit. And by making the characters real in this way, by cutting away the trivia that suffocates most contemporary literature, the world in which they live, real or no, also becomes more real. Note the popularity of Richard Adams' *Watership Down*, a fantasy about a group of rabbits searching for a new home when their haven is destroyed, fighting and surviving on their trek towards a new land. They are heroes in every sense of the word, though they are not "human", overcoming various obstacles during their pilgrimage. Adams skill as a writer becomes evident as he gives his heroic rabbits human qualities and traits, while another, less capable author would have taken the premise of *Watership Down*, ignored its potential as an unbelievable concept, and turned it into a children's book.

I love the works of Tolkien for the magic and wonder to be found within but also for the greatness and nobility of his characters, qualities so conspicuously devoid from our own world of plasticity and sterility. Naturalism, the opposite of Romanticism, sees the world as it is, offers no changes or value judgements. It decrees that the writer's task is to report, not to create; to observe, not to judge. The Romanticists, of which Tolkien is one, are the true creators, who show what is possible in abstract, if not concrete, terms. There *are* dragons to slay if one has courage and grandeur.

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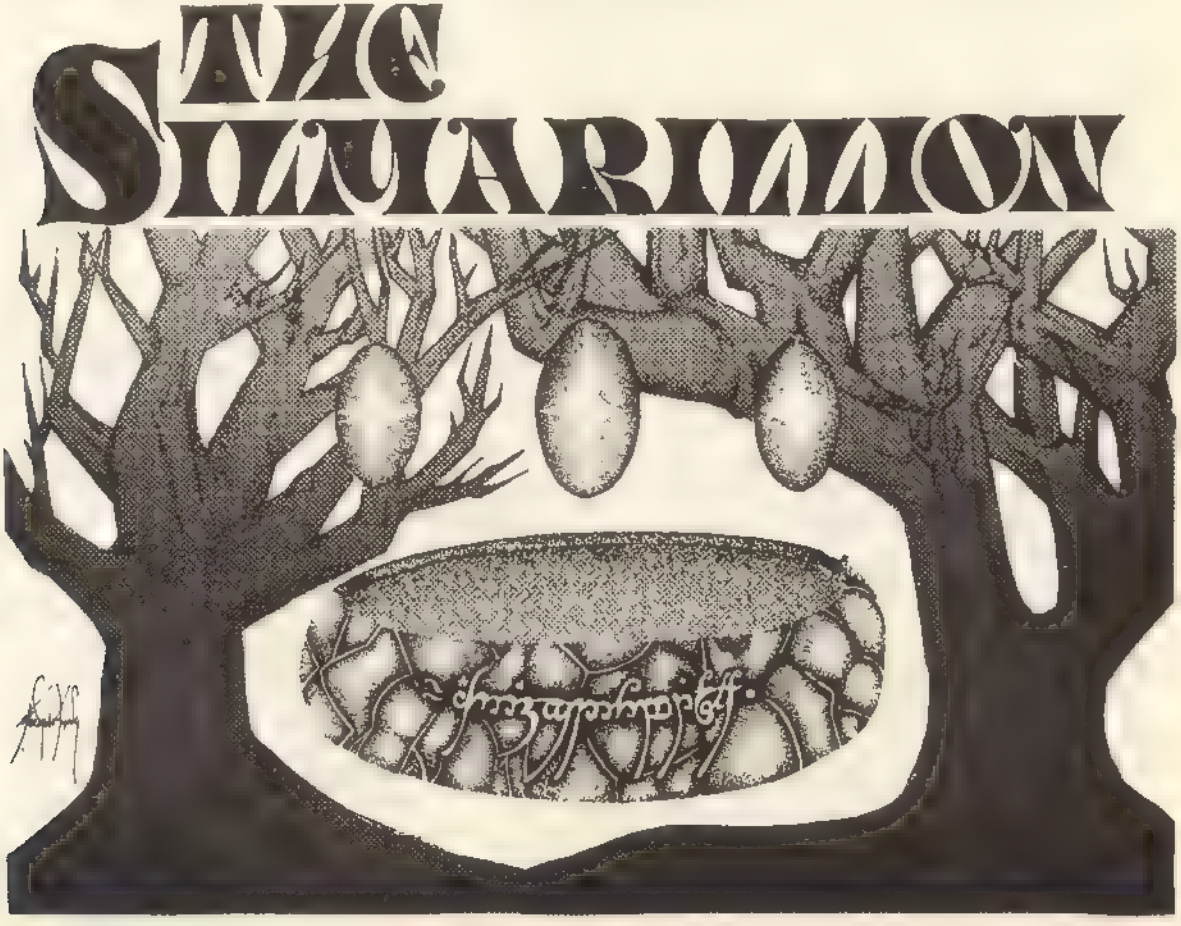
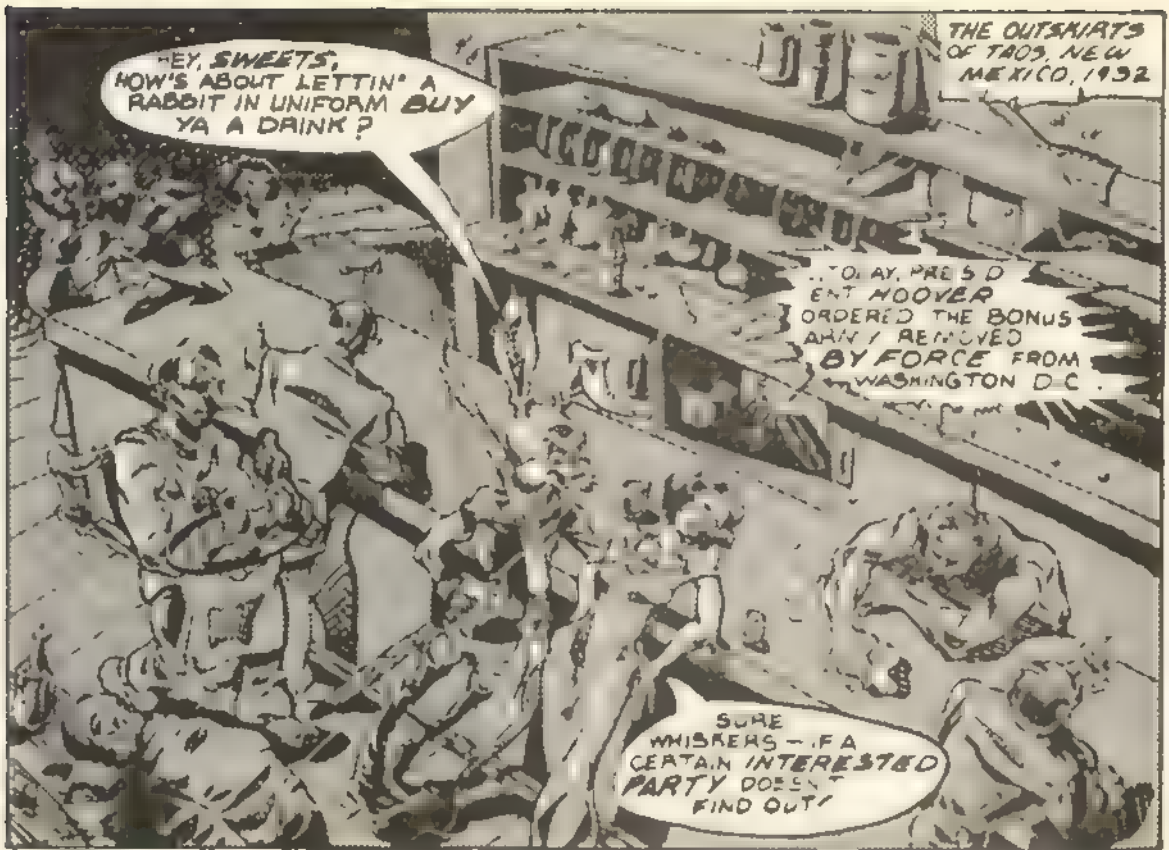
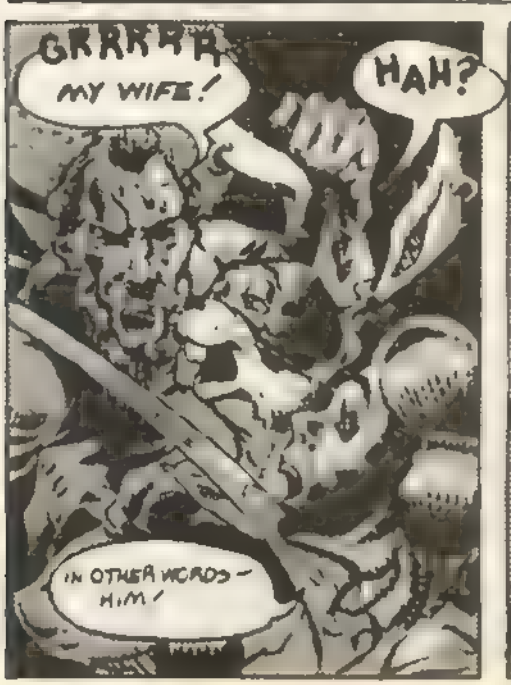
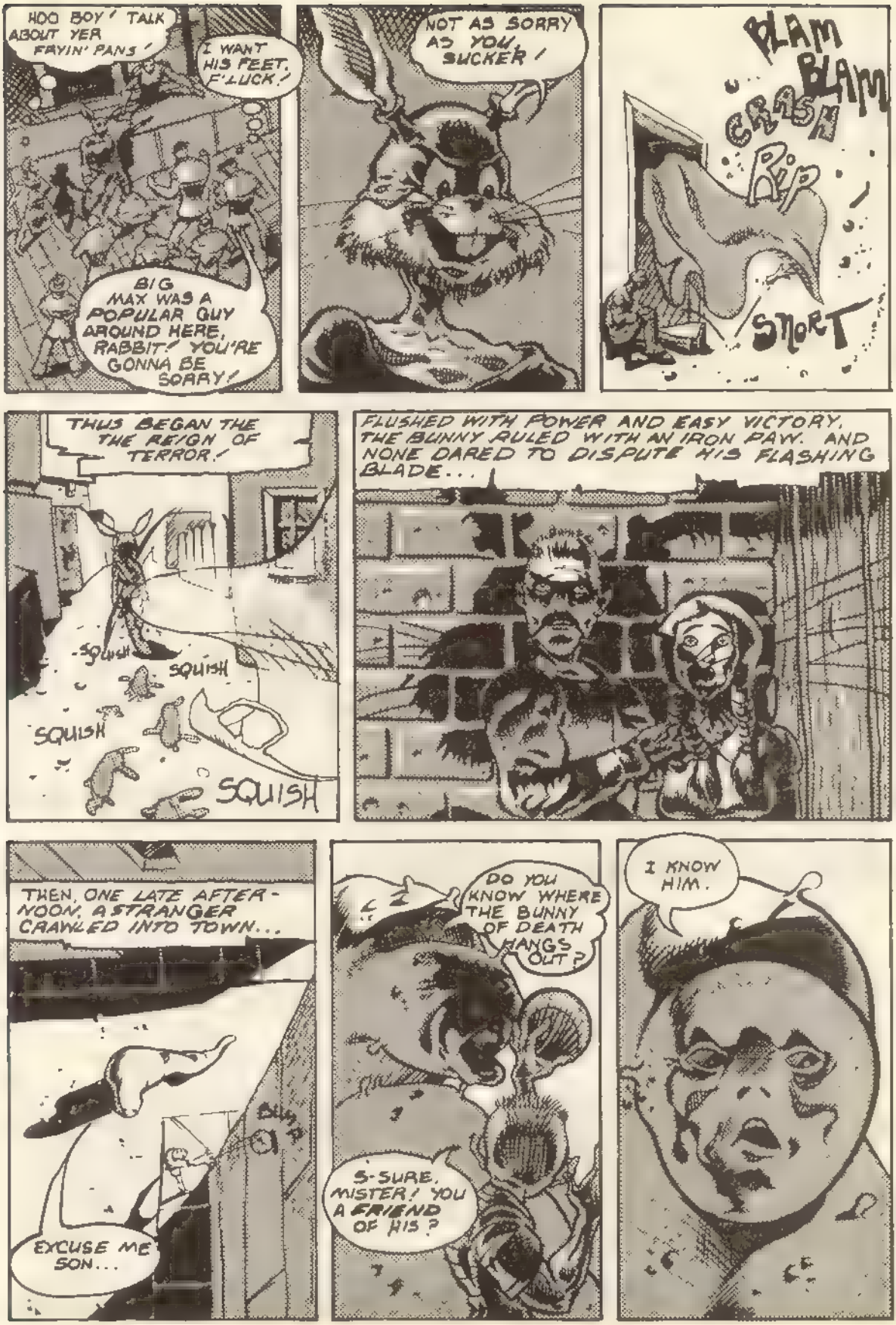



HEY, SWEETS, HOW'S ABOUT LETTIN' A RABBIT IN UNIFORM BUY YA A DRINK?
THE OUTSKIRTS OF TAOS, NEW MEXICO, 1932
TODAY, PRESIDENT HOOVER ORDERED THE BONUS ARMY REMOVED BY FORCE FROM WASHINGTON D.C.
SURE WHISKERS — IF A CERTAIN INTERESTED PARTY DOESN'T FIND OUT!

THE BUNNY OF DEATH IN THE HARE, THE MAN & THE DESERT

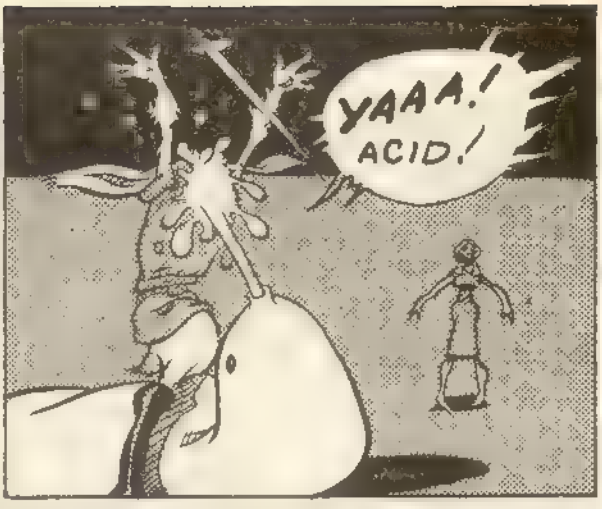



HOO BOY! TALK ABOUT YER FRYIN' PANS!
I WANT HIS FEET, F'LUCK!
BIG MAX WAS A POPULAR GUY AROUND HERE, RABBIT! YOU'RE GONNA BE SORRY!
NOT AS SORRY AS YOU, SUCKER!
BLAM BLAM
CRASH
RIP
SNORT
THUS BEGAN THE THE REIGN OF TERROR!
SQUISH
SQUISH
SQUISH
SQUISH
FLUSHED WITH POWER AND EASY VICTORY, THE BUNNY RULED WITH AN IRON PAW. AND NONE DARED TO DISPUTE HIS FLASHING BLADE...
THEN, ONE LATE AFTER-NOON, A STRANGER CRAWLED INTO TOWN...
Bump
EXCUSE ME SON...
DO YOU KNOW WHERE THE BUNNY OF DEATH HANGS OUT?
S-SURE, MISTER! YOU A FRIEND OF HIS?
I KNOW HIM.

GHURR* WA TEHEART: PINKERTON SLEUTH, LUMBER JACK, MASTER CHEF, SOLDIER OF FORTUNE, GOLDHUNTER.
THANKS KID!
HE'S SET-UP OVER T' TH SPEAK' ON MAIN AN' FOURTH!
HE WAS A STRONG WORM, YET A GENTLE WORM, A WORM-OF-MYSTERY WHO HAD LEFT A TRAIL OF WILD RUMOURS, AND SURMISE FROM FRENCH INDO-CHINA TO THE SUDAN.!
...A WORM WITH A SENSE OF PURPOSE WHICH BURNED LIKE OILY TALLOW IN OLD CANDLES.
RABBIT! I WANT TO TALK TO YOU!
LAST YEAR YOU RAIDED OUR BURROWS KILLED OUR NITS, DESTROYED OUR MAGGOTS!
SO I DON'T LIKE WORMS!
I'VE COME 2000 MILES TO FIND YOU!
I ALWAYS FIGURED TO BE YER DEATH, WORM!
'CAUSE YOU DON'T CHEAT.!

ALL THROUGH THE LONG AFTERNOON THEY FOUGHT; THESE TWO OLD ENEMIES WHO MIGHT HAVE BEEN COMRADES
AND THEN..
BLAM
WHAP
Click
DIE DAMN YOU, DIE DIE! WHY DONT YOU...
DIE?
PLOP

TH' COOP DA GRAZ!


YAAA! ACID!

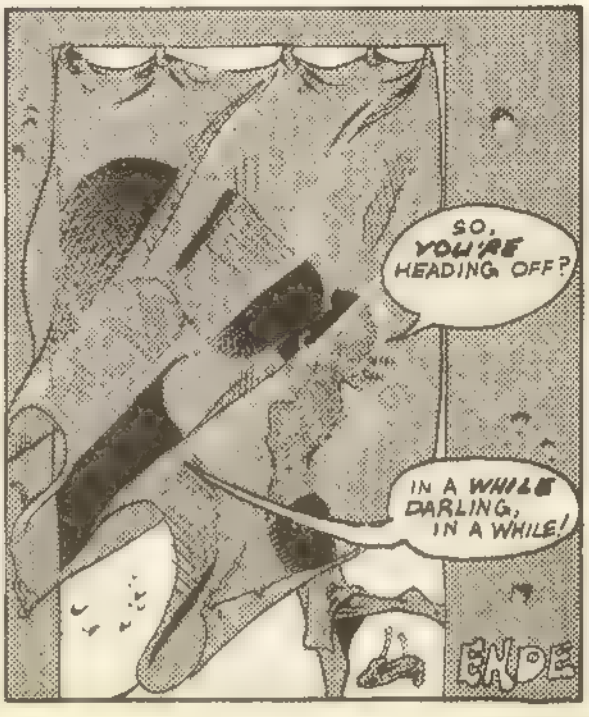
HALF MAD, BLIND — THE HARE OF TERROR PLUNGES INTO THE DESERT...
YAAA

AND THE GREAT BLIND UNWINKING EYE OF THE SUN LOOKS DOWN WITH THE IMPASSIVITY OF AN IDIOT GOD...
YAAA

ON AND ON RUNS THE BUNNY, DEEPER AND DEEPER INTO THE WASTE AS IF TO ESCAPE PAIN OR HIS FATE..
YAAA

UNTIL HE IS LOST AMID THE FLAMING HEAT AND DRIFTING SAND...

WELL, WE WORMS HAVE A LOT OF ENDURANCE! EIGHT HEARTS, Y'KNOW!
HOW DID YOU KEEP ON FIGHTING SO LONG P SUCH BRAVERY!
JUST A MATTER OF LUCK, REALLY!
WELL, I THINK YOU WERE THE BEE'S KNEES!

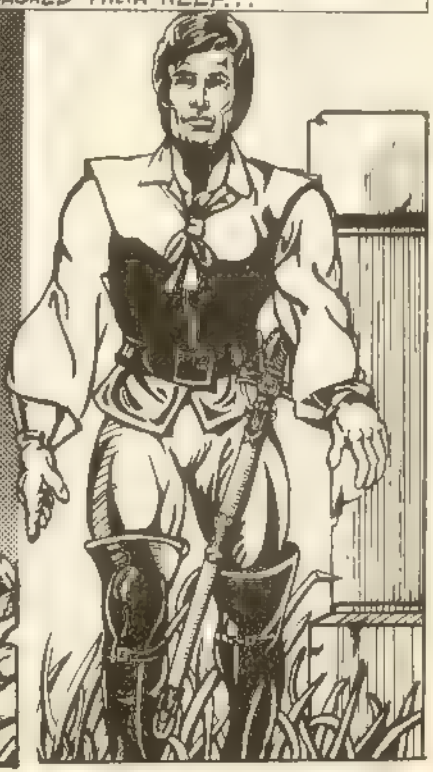

SO, YOU'RE HEADING OFF?
IN A WHILE DARLING, IN A WHILE!
ENDE

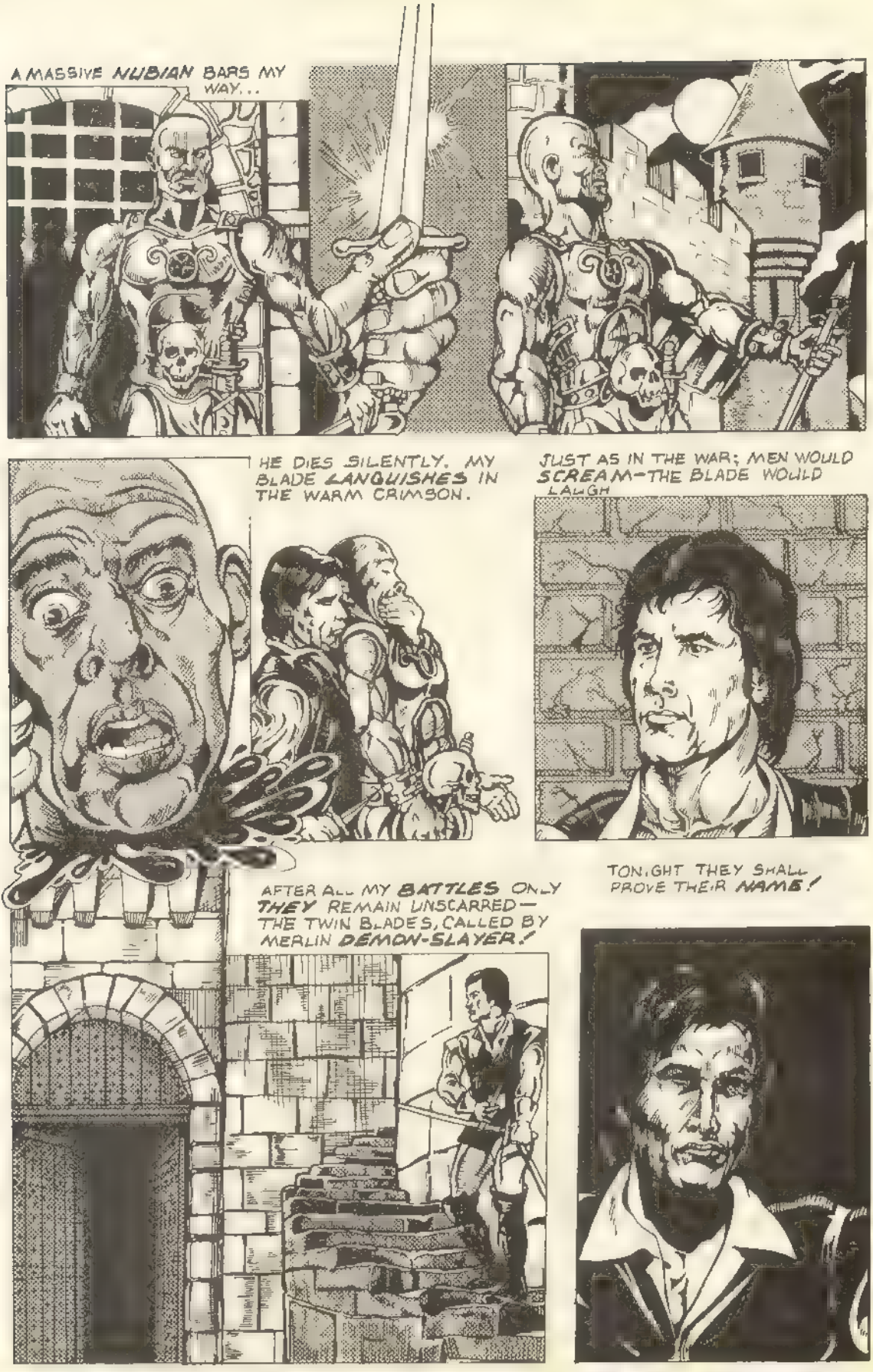
I WAS FIVE WHEN THE **SWORD** AND **DAGGER** WERE PRESENTED TO ME. **GRANDFATHER** WOULD LULL ME TO SLEEP WITH WHISPERS OF **ARTHUR** AND THE INTRIGUES OF HIS COURT. HE **TOLD** HOW THE FABLED MAGE, ONE **MERLIN**, CRAFTED THE TWIN BLADES OF **SILVER MAGIC**. LEGENDS AND FAIRYTALES.
AS I REACHED **MANHOOD** I FOUND MYSELF HEIR TO AN IMPOVERISHED ESTATE AND **LORD** OF ITS HUNGRY PEOPLE.
I WAS ALSO HEIR TO A **WANDER-LUST** WHICH SENT ME ON THE **CRUSADE** AGAINST THE **TURK** AND TO THE BLACKENED WALLS OF **CONSTANTINOPLE**. IT WAS **THERE** I SAW THE END TO **LEGENDS** AND **FAIRYTALES**.

"Demon Slayer"

PLOT AND ART BY: David L Monak

SO I RETURNED HOME TO **FIND** MY KEEP IN RUINS, AND THE **VILLAGE** IN TATTERS. **PILLAGERS** HAD COME AND STOLEN AWAY A MAIDEN. I WAS **LORD**. I APPROACHED THEIR KEEP...




A MASSIVE NUBIAN BARS MY WAY...
HE DIES SILENTLY. MY BLADE LANGUISHES IN THE WARM CRIMSON.
JUST AS IN THE WAR; MEN WOULD SCREAM—THE BLADE WOULD LAUGH
AFTER ALL MY BATTLES ONLY THEY REMAIN UNSCARRED— THE TWIN BLADES, CALLED BY MERLIN DEMON-SLAYER!
TONIGHT THEY SHALL PROVE THEIR NAME!

BEFORE ME A MENAGERIE OF PERVERSIONS WAIT LUSTILY FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF THE MAID THEY HAVE SO RUDELY SEIZED!
THE WITHERING CEREMONY REACHES ITS CLIMAX!
HOLD FIEND!

AS SO MANY TIMES BEFORE, THE LAUGHTER .
. AND THE PAIN... AGAIN AND AGAIN THE TWIN SLIVERS OF METAL REND FLESH AND UNFLESH, MAN AND . . .
. . . DAEMON!
STRENGTH! JOY! THE LOVING CROON OF METAL!
I TURN. MY BRAIN SET AFIRE BY THE SIREN'S GAZE SHE IS EVIL! SHE IS DEATH! AND STILL I AM COMPELLED TO HER!
STOP! ALL OF YOU! HE'S MINE!

COME, O MAV— LET ME TEACH YOU THE TRUE WAY.' EMBRACE ME! COMFORT ME.
DEMON-SLAYER CRIES FOR BLOOD! AND YET. THOSE EYES... HER LIPS... MY BLADE GROWS HEAVY... I TOUCH HER. EVER SO GENTLY. . LOVE. ...DEATH ..
SUDDENLY, SHE SPASMS AS DEMON-SLAYER DRINKS FOR THE LAST TIME THIS DARK NIGHT. I AM NOT.. CERTAIN... HOW? LAUGHTER FILLS ME... LAUGHTER OR DEATH!
THE OTHERS ARE GONE. I CARE NOT HOW! I AM DEEPLY TROUBLED THAT IN SOME WAY DEMON-SLAYER HAS A LIFE OF ITS OWN, AND I AM ITS VESSLE...
REST QUIETLY, CHILD. THE NIGHTMARE IS OVER.
Ahhn. I —
OVER? I TREMBLE MYSELF LIKE A FRIGHTENED CHILD. I AM TOO WEARY FOR TEARS. THE DEMON-SLAYER LAUGHS.

Spare Fodder

STORY ▼ BOB LEAHY
ART ▼ DEAN TEMPLETON

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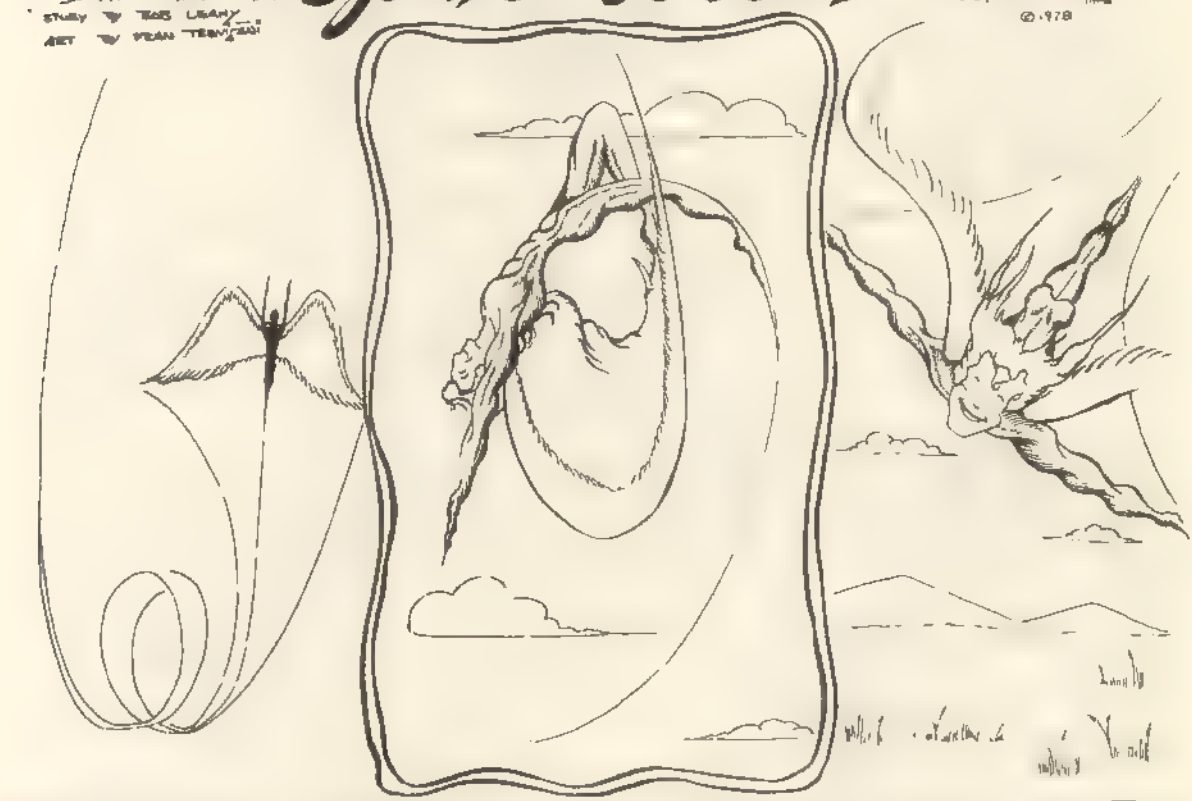

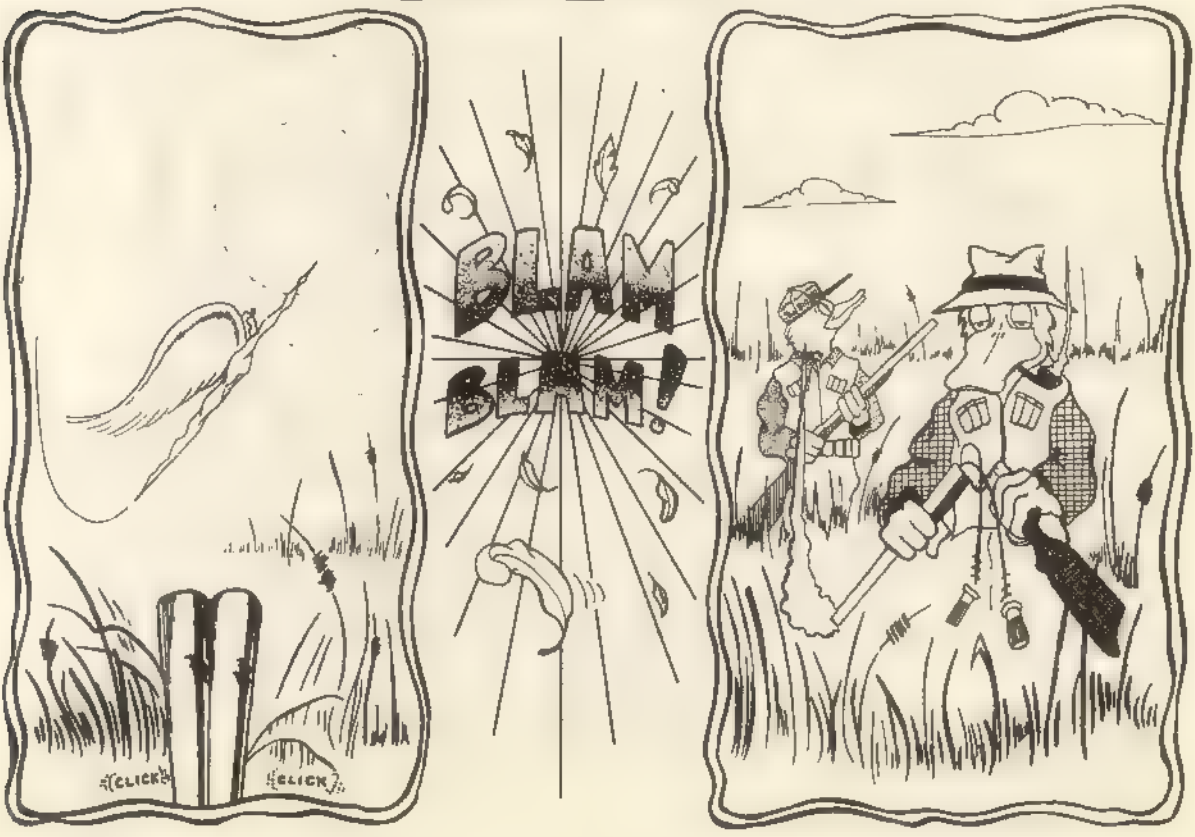

Eglee

CHRISTOPHER ENTERPRISES HAS FILED FOR BANKRUPTCY; AND I, DAVE HARRIS HAVE PURCHASED THE STOCK, I.E. THE MERCHANDISE FROM THE TRUSTEE OF THE COURT. TO RECOUP THIS IMMEDIATE EXPENSE, I AM ANNOUNC-ING A SPECIAL ONE MONTH LIQUI-DATION SALE!

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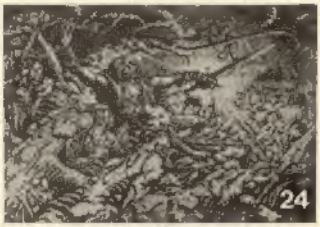
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PORTFOLIOS

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8. Darkness and the Metamorph

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